HEROES ON FILM

$2 - $3.95

DRACULINA PUBLISHING

















HEROES ON FILM

#2 - NOV 1995

EDITORIAL - below
LETTERS - 2
ULTRA SCAN - 4
KAMEN RIDER REPORT - 12
SUPERHEROES BY NATIONALITY-18
SENTAI SECTION #2 - 32
REVIEWS - 36
ZINES - 48

editor & writer
DAMON FOSTER

publisher
HUGH GALLAGHER

layout
HUGH GALLAGHER

contributors
LARRY ANDERSON
LINDA ARROYO
PAT BISHOW
JORG BUTTGEREIT
DON COLEY
MAX DELLA MORA
JOHN EMMA
SETSUKO EMMA
JOHN GRACE
PAUL HABERMAN
DAISUKE ISHIZUKA
KIMMIE JOHNSON
MASSIMO LAVAGNINI
CRAIG LEDBETTER
ED MARTINEZ
BRIAN MORAN
AUGUST RAGONE
JIMMY ROBINSON
PAUL SCHIOLA
HELEN K. SOO
TAI SENG VIDEO
ALAN WESTBY

Copyrights are that of the respective production and/or distribution companies. HOF is strictly a periodical of critical review and assumes no rights over the characters depicted herein. HOF is copyright ©1995 Damon Foster. No part of this magazine may be reprinted in whole or part without written consent of HOF's editor and publisher. HOF is published irregularly by DRACULINA PUBLISHING, PO BOX 587, GLEN CARBON, IL 62034.

Fans of live action heroes come from more genres & fandoms than there are loudmouthed idiots on Superbowl Sunday. There are also, of course, fans of comics and cartoons, but to me, real superhero thrills come from the live action avengers of 3-dimensional TV and cinema. There are more comic book readers and animation freaks than there are Bigwheels parked outside Michael Jackson's bachelor pad, but it has taken a while for live action hero fandom to get organized and established. So me hopes HOF is a step in the right direction; from Japan's Ultraman and Kamen Rider, to Italy's Three Fantastic Supermen, to our own Green Hornet, and all points inbetween.

As an irritating, hyper-active problem child, superheroes who first inspired me included ULTRAMAN, Adam West's BATMAN, and obviously Kato of GREEN HORNET. In the 1960s, these programs set the pace for me, it was that unbeatable combination of sci-fi, martial arts and comedic camp which, in my mind, defined what superheroes were all about. I later watched tamer stuff like THE LONE RANGER, SUPERMAN and SHAZAM, but was nowhere near as impressed. I'm afraid Ultraman, Green Hornet and Kikaider spoiled me for less energetic heroes. Sorry, ELECTRA WOMAN AND DYNA GIRL, though your legs & hips may look good in tights, you just don't cut it as superheroes!

As mentioned last issue, 1970s programs like SPECTREMAN made me realize what I needed was more foreign input, so I began scanning local Japanese TV stations and nearby stores which imported Japanese books, posters and dolls! Thanks to the likes of KIKAIDER, KAMEN RIDER and INAZUMAN FLASH, I've never looked back, and rarely had to sit through an episode of ISIS or THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN! So over the years, I've collected more Japanese videotapes than there are bearded fat men at a sci-fi con. Not only did I always enjoy watching these Japanese programs the way Oprah Winfried enjoys food, but I also reviewed them in numerous counter-culture magazines (most notably my ORIENTAL CINEMA, one of the longest running fanzines ever), so it became easy for me to forget that IRON KING and BAROM 1 are completely unknown in the American mainstream. Just because I consider AKUMAIZER 3 and MIRRORMAN to be household words doesn't mean anyone else does.

It finally dawned on me (in 1989) that some of the most exciting TV programs are complete unknowns in America. Back then, all this hype for the then-new BATMAN movie (with Michael Keaton) had gotten me more annoyed than a Christian who's just been told, "That Holy Bible was quite an interesting novel!". Back then, I earned minuscule wage at a suburban costume shop which was selling many a Batman costume. Batman was all the rave, it's all anyone talked about. Meanwhile, over in Japan, there's a huge Ultraman craze, brought on by news of a collaboration with Australia (the program became known years later as ULTRAMAN: TOWARD THE FUTURE). Anyway, some lady at work is going on about Batman's revival, and I interject: "What a coincidence! This is a good year for superheroes! I hear over in Japan, Ultraman is making a big comeback too!" She gave me a blank stare, are said: "Ultraman? Never heard of it." Hopefully, the existence of HOF will help stomp out that self-centered idiocy. So here are some questions I keep asking myself: 1. Why are Americans so narrow minded? 2. Why is it that so many of my girlfriends (over the decades) wore baggy pants & ugly sweaters while I dated them, and yet wore make-up & mini-skirts after we broke up? 3. Have POWER RANGERS finally brought Japanese superheroes into the American mainstream? These are the types of questions HOF hopes to eventually answer.

One last thing before ending this editorial. This issue is dedicated to the memory of my pal Danny Pastor, who passed away due to cancer-related illness on March 19, 1995. Danny was a good friend of mine for many years. His tragic & untimely (he was only about 27) death brought back memories of when he

and I first met as teenagers. At the time, both of us had similarly dyed haircuts, which is more-or-less what brought us together. You see, I was working on maintenance & carpentry at the time, restoring a large, old victorian-style house which happened to be located right next to his high school. So he'd walk by everyday, on his way to the bus stop, and couldn't help but noticing my strange hair style, leather jacket, etc. (back then, there was more of a unity between 'punks', since Seattle's grunge hadn't brought it into the mainstream; Greenday could not have won a Grammy back then!). Eager to make a friend with somebody who looked like he was into the same 'alternative' music scene as himself, he struck up a conversation, using the bizarre line, "Excuse me, is this house a mortuary?" I always assumed he was testing my creativity, spontaneity & humor, seeing what kind of response I'd give him. Without missing a beat, I quickly spouted back: "Yes, and it's haunted! Just listen to the ghosts!" I made a scary "eee eee eee" sound, like the sinister laugh of a spirit. Okay, so it's not absolutely hilarious, but you gotta' remember, I had absolutely no time to come up with something truly genius; it was a brief, spur of the second thing. Danny was intrigued yet a little paranoid about my loud, sudden outburst, and immediately started walking toward the bus stop- quickly.

Yet the next day, we'd make a little more small-talk. By the end of the week, I'd given him a ride home, as it turned out he lived only a few blocks from me, in the East Bay hills! Not only were we both avid fans of punk rock and new wave (anything from Sex Pistols, to Devo, to Ultravox), but, amazingly, later found we had other mutual interests; i.e. a love of kung fu films and Godzilla movies! But I'll never forget when he told me his favorite TV shows included KIKAIDA and ULTRAMAN! Needless to say, we saw a lot of each other over the next 11 years, be it buying Godzilla dolls at San Francisco's Japan Center, seeing THE KILLER and A CHINESE GHOST STORY in theaters before HK cinema got ridiculously trendy, stagediving at Dead Kennedys gigs, or just hanging out for a peaceful afternoon duping KIKAIDA & AKUMAIZA 3 tapes.

I remember one incident when Danny, myself and Ed Martinez made the mistake of seeing Motorhead, Exodus & Wendy O.Williams at some auditorium. Some idiot in the slam-dance pit (now called 'mosh' pits this week) hit Danny way too hard, so Danny politely stepped aside and waited for that rude jerk to go full circle. As the cycle came to its end, that bastard came near a patiently waiting Danny, who smacked him hard. Oddly, we never saw where that creep landed. Danny was also quite a lady's man at the clubs. Despite his being somewhat overweight, he never had any problem attracting some truly gorgeous babes! 'Til this day, I never could figure out his secret, and now, the secret will never be known!

But my readers will be interested to know that Danny has been in several of my videos which some of you have bought. In HOT DOGS ON THE RUN (1990), he played not only the cameraman in the Chuck Norris parody, but El Burito Negro (a masked Mexican wrestler, which put his fluent Spanish to good use), and a henchman in the 'Bruce Lee vs. Japanese karateka' satire. Danny was also a faithful actor in 1993's AGE OF DEMONS; often as a background henchman and stunt double. He was one of many to so generously slave away wearing the thick, rubber demon costume. He also gave 100% when taking part in several choreographed stage-fights we performed at sci-fi cons. In one, he played an unfortunate criminal who got kicked into unconsciousness by Green Hornet sidekick (pun intended) Kato, played by Perry Wong. In a later stage-show, Danny's slight heaviness proved useful when he volunteered to play the rake-wielding Pa Chieh (aka Pigsy), in a five minute, live skit based on the Monkey King legend.

Danny may have been crude & vulgar at times, but it was all in the cause of humor, and he had a good heart. He was always willing to go all out if it meant helping a friend, and never asked for anything in return. He was also a supporter of the arts; from underground music to kung fu, monsters, hopping vampires and superheroes. He's gone and will be missed. As a close friend of mine whom I could relate to on many levels, I can't help but feel the fandom is a little less devoted & fun without him. He was highly openminded, and when I showed him ACES GO PLACES 2, he did what so few Americans do and decided he wanted the whole series (back then, it was difficult to get uninitiated Americans to watch Chinese movies). To those who knew him, he was a true friend. To those who didn't know him, he wasn't a true friend, because they'd never met him, of course! Do you think it's disrespectful for me to joke around about a deceased friend? Of course not, Danny had a great sense of humor, and would have wanted it that way. If it were I who died, I'd expect him to joke a little too.



Your editor DF getting harassed by a BALTAN for not doing a magazine called VILLAINS ON FILM!

From one tragic situation to the next! This one doesn't involve any deaths that I know of, but can be equally depressing to all you Ultra fans. As I understand it, Tsuburaya Studios (in Tokyo) actually has the original Hawaiian English dubbed ULTRASEVEN episodes (not the goofy dubs seen on TNT with the crappy music), in their vaults, as well as something extremely rare: English dubbed episodes of ULTRAMAN TARO, of all things!! Supposedly, the English dubbings of TARO were actually dubbed in Malaysia (where English is sort of a second language), so the characters, though speaking English, have Malaysian accents. Malaysian or not, it's still English, making these priceless novelties a must see for American fans! Why the bloody hell haven't those idiots in Japan released this stuff to America? They would certainly be rare, big hits in American videostores!! I just don't get it, I mean them Tsuburaya dudes could make serious bucks at a minimal cost to them; the episodes are already in English!! They're just sitting on shelves collecting dust. I think we Ultra fans can unite and make it clear we would like to see these released legally, legitimately to the American mainstream. I suggest you write to Ultracom Inc., 801 N. Brand Blvd., Suite 665, Glendale, CA 91203; I suppose they're the official U.S. distributors of Ultraman products or whatever. Ultra fans should also contact QuestClub, 12440 Moorpark St. #150, Studio City, CA 91604, but their Ultraman merchandise seems to consist largely of Baseball caps, T-shirts, etc., unfortunately. I think we would all rather see ULTRAMAN TARO in English than just wear some silly hat. So let's make it clear to them that they'll have a much better chance at getting our money if they offer rare videotapes, rather than hats & shirts. **-Damon Foster**

PO BOX 576 - FREMONT, CA - 94537

LETTERS

As mentioned in H.O.F's first issue, you are incorrect when discussing the year of serial heroes. Those you mentioned were actually 1940 films (except MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN; 1939). There were, however, other heroes in the 1930s- DICK TRACY (1937), ZORO RIDES AGAIN (1937), THE LONE RANGER (1938), THE FIGHTING DEVIL DOGS (1938), THE SPIDER'S WEB (1939), The Black Falcon in FLYING G-MEN (1939) and an earlier serial called THE FIGHTING MARINES (1935).

I'm a writer and would like (very much) to contribute some articles or even reviews. Here I leave you with an idea of what I can contribute. A short article on "Serial Heroines". You showed a list of serial heroes you've never heard of. Have you heard of THE TIGER WOMAN? I add with conviction, no I'm not professing any feminist bullshit! I'm merely stating that women are not portrayed as "heroines". As you said clearly, though WONDER WOMAN, the TV series, was 'campy', Linda Carter had a 'gorgeous physique' (NO LIE!). Heroines are 'looked at' as sex-symbols in live action, and not as fighting heroines.

Are you familiar with the British shows DR. WHO and RED DWARF? Do you consider these heroes? I sure do!

Sincerely,
Linda Arroyo
Baltimore, MD

Dear Linda,

Again I'm faced with the world's most difficult question; trying to isolate exactly which kinds of "heroes" belong in H.O.F! Despite heroic characters in DR. WHO and RED DWARF, I don't consider these superhero programs per-se, but British sci-fi. Likewise with Dick Tracy, who I always thought was a detective. I guess for the sake of classification and elimination of non essentials, I consider a superhero to be a bit more unusual, mysterious, or with superhuman powers. If they can't fly or fire laser beams, they should at least wear some sort of fancy mask or costume to conceal their identity. This, in my mind, draws the fine line between 'human hero', and 'super hero', though every rule has its exceptions. Besides, there has always been a thriving DR. WHO fandom (don't ask me why), so I can't see including that in H.O.F, not so long as obscurities like HERO FLASH (Korean), 3 DEV ADAM (Turkish) and GREENMAN (Japanese) continue to be neglected. -DF

Regarding the movie serials you mentioned in the 1930's part of Superheroes: Breakdown by Decade article, I think I might be able to shed some light on some of your questions. I think that the CAPTAIN AMERICA sequel was released in 1944 and was 15 chapters, CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT was in 1942 and was 15 chapters, MANDRAKE was in 1939 and was 12 parts, THE PHANTOM was in 1943 and was 15 parts, SPY SMASHER was in 1942 and was 12 parts, and VIGILANTE was in 1946.

THE SHADOW STRIKES was a movie released in 1937. There was THE SHADOW movie serial in 1940, and THE SHADOW STRIKES, BEHIND THE MASK, and THE MISSING LADY in 1946. There was also a 1958 movie called INVISIBLE AVENGER. I dug up all this crap out of the book The Encyclopedia of Superheroes by Jeff Rovin. There are entries on ULTRAMAN and INFRAMAN, so Rovin isn't totally ignorant, but then again, he wrote that INFRAMAN was a Japanese movie.

Alan Mansueto
New Jersey

I recently purchased issue #1 of your magazine, Heroes on Film, and found it to be a fantastic publication! Like you, as a twerp in the 1970s, I grew up on and was fascinated with the Japanese heroes of that era, such as KIKAIDER, KAMEN RIDER, GO RANGERS and others. My schoolyard memories of 'playing Kikaider' with friends were successfully repressed in my brain (due to a fair amount of embarrassment), but reading your article made me realize I am not the only adult who still gets a kick out of watching those Toei superheroes! Thanks for 'bringing me out of the closet'.

I found a lot of our opinions concerning live action superheroes to be similar: I also found the saccharine-sweet era of the 70s with CAPTAIN MARVEL, ISIS, ELECTRA WOMAN & DYNA GIRL and WONDER WOMAN to be woefully deficient compared to the caffeine-like rush of the Toei shows, although watching Linda Carter in her stunning costume did ease the torment. I have not, and unlike you, will not watch an episode of MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS, as I feel this show bastardizes the original, despite the fact that this 'chopped-up hybrid' may be even better than the show it was based from. My feelings are similar for Carl Macek and his efforts in 'mutating' three different anime programs into his "Robotech" cartoon; again, that's just my opinion, and it may be my loss for being inflexible.

A couple requests if I may. In future issues I would appreciate seeing articles and updates on the Toei (?) shows RAINBOWMAN and DIAMOND EYE. Although the histories and backgrounds of ULTRAMAN, KIKAIDER, and KAMEN RIDER have been well chronicled, I have seen scant if any information about these two shows since watching them in the '70s. An update as to what the actors are currently doing now would also be interesting.

Secondly, I realize that anime is not within the scope of Heroes on Film, but I used to watch a Japanese cartoon in the early 1970s called PRINCESS KNIGHT. This was about the daughter of a kind who begrudgingly looked and dressed like a boy since her father wanted a son instead of a daughter. I have not seen any videos or other information about this show in 20 years, so I was wondering if you or your contacts might be able to help.

Lastly, I read in Animag of a 'now-censored episode 12 of ULTRASEVEN, which apparently is rare and a so-called collector's item, yet no mention was made as to what was so infamous about that episode that needed to be censored. Was the actor's penis outline visible thru the costume? Did he have an erection? Arrgh, I hate it when an article leaves you 'dangling' (ahem) without giving you the entire story.

Good luck with your new publication. It's a joy to read, and I look forward to the next issue at my favorite comicbook store.

Wallace Kamikawa
Hawaii

Dear Wallace,

Thanks for the comments on H.O.F.#1! As to your questions, RAINBOWMAN & DIAMOND EYE are actually Toho shows, and since my video collection consists of only a couple of each series, I don't see me doing an indepth review on them any time soon. I did, however, review RAINBOWMAN (all based on the only episode I had seen!) in a back issue of ORIENTAL CINEMA a while back.

Sorry, I can't help you on PRINCESS KNIGHT, as I'm as much an expert on cartoons as I am an expert on breathing underwater. But I can tell you this about the censored ULTRASEVEN #13, which I have yet to see: It dealt with radio-active mutants, the result of some atomic bomb or whatever. Though I hear there was nothing gory or shocking about it, the Japanese audiences, who still have strong feelings about the bombing of Hiroshima, found the script a little too disturbing. So the episode was banned, and there have been attempts every few years to release this elusive episode on video, but it always ends up being protested into oblivion, even today! Hell, they didn't even show it on TNT when those morons broadcast a few episodes for a month or two. I too am frustrated that ULTRASEVEN #13 is so hard to locate. Censorship sucks, my motto is, "If you don't like it, don't watch it". -Damon Foster

Dear Heroes on Film,

I found your mag on the way out of a comic shop. I was caught by the Ultraman picture on the cover. I really enjoyed all the Ultra info and pictures! I first learned of Ultraman from a comic mag, but have only seen a few episodes, and want to see more! I would also like to know about subscribing to your Heroes on Film. What's up for next issue? Thanks a lot! What's up with ULTRAMAN POWERED?

Patrick Powell
Georgia

Dear Patrick,

Don't worry, getting ULTRAMAN on tape is not difficult. There are plenty of video dealers & traders out there with it. The problem is, especially with the bootleggers & video pirates, some tapes are sold at ridiculously high prices and often of poor, multi-copied quality. I did hear a while back that original pre-records were finally going to get legitimate release, but I don't know if it ever actually happened. For more info on Ultra-related products, write to: Ultracom Inc, 801 North Brand Blvd. #665, Glendale, CA 91203. As for ULTRAMAN POWERED, ULTRAMAN POWERD, ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO, ULTRAMAN POWERD: THE ULTIMATE HERO, or whatever the bloody hell it's called, reasons for this American made program's elusiveness are varied. Originally, I was hearing rumors like "Tsuburaya decided not to release it just yet, to keep it from competing with Tsuburaya's other American co-production, SUPER HUMAN SAMURAI SYBER SQUAD." But speculative word of mouth has it that ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO is just so damn awful, that no American distributor will touch this boring heap of crap. I'm incapable of sitting through an entire episode, but those who have been unfortunate enough to do so, claim its writers, directors, etc. have done a major disservice to Ultraman fans everywhere, by making this the worst Ultra series ever. -DF

Lenell here, I'm writing to you because I've read your new Heroes on Film and I loved it! Your coverage of super heroes of film is probably the best I've seen in years! I know you must have sweated and worked hard on the mag-- I think it was worth it! Keep up the good work. I liked the Ultra-column in it. It should tell fans more on ULTRAMAN.

You said in future issues of HOF you may be doing episode guides of TV shows? How about U.S. heroes of TV as well? I've done episode guides and articles on SHAZAM, ISIS, etc! Let me know, Damon! In other news, I hear Saban is bringing over KAMEN RIDER BLACK to the states, in my opinion, this is going to be disastrous!

I heard you made a home movie called AGE OF DEMONS. I'm interested in it. How much are you asking for a copy? I've heard you were great in it.

Lenell Bridges
Illinois

Dear Lenell,

Yes, AGE OF DEMONS (VHS only; $15.00 per tape) is one of about four amateur, no-budget videos I've produced, directed, edited, starred in, etc. People are welcome to buy AOD from me, as well as the other three: HOT DOGS ON THE RUN ($10.00), DAMON FOSTER'S WEIRD VIDEOS ($10.00), and THE ADVENTURES OF MYSTERON ($10.00). However, I must warn you that these tapes are hardly what I'd consider safe, family entertainment! These are comedies for adults only! DF'S WEIRD VIDEOS has some truly sick & perverted humor, MYSTERON has its share of mature (and immature subject matter), HOT DOGS has some gore & offensive ethnic stereotyping and AOD is easily my sleaziest, most disgusting video yet. There's fowl language, nudity, gore and insulting humor. Though AOD does involve sci-fi, martial arts, monsters & superheroes, it's still definitely not recommended for children!

As for your generous offer of supplying HOF with episode guides of SHAZAM and MIGHTY ISIS, I could use them only if you had photos and information to make it interesting, like a complete article: Background on the shows, directors, critical commentary, actors, etc. In fact, this offer goes out to everyone reading this. If any of you would like to share your superhero knowledge with HOF's readers, and have any such info, photos or background on any superheroes, your involvement in HOF is highly welcome! -DF

The Ultra Brothers are a passion for me, but for the most part, there is no Asian TV here except one of the cable access channels that airs Korean news at 6:0 a.m. The good side is we have three Mexican TV stations, which I find a god-send, because every now and then they air Mexican wrestling movies, or one of the many bizarre horror/sci-fi flicks which happens to be another topic of interest to me.

Again, my strong points for HOF are probably Mexican wrestlers, and Mexican horror/sci-fi. But I am more than willing to write about anything you need, \ *Well get started then! I can always use reviews of Mexican wrestling flicks, but only ones not reviewed in HOF as yet. Photos or illustrations to accompany the film help too. Thanks for the offer! -DF/* I don't want to blow my horn, but my whole life is dedicated to horror and sci-fi, which may seem kind of geekish but at least I have a life.

Paul Schiola
Colorado

Out here in Hawaii, it takes a while for a small press publication like yours to get here, but the first issue of HEROES ON FILM was definately worth the wait. Congratulations! However, as your disclaimer acknowledged, I was genuinely disapointed that the "Superheroes: Breakdown by Decade" wasn't better researched. I am a major comic book fan, particularly of the JSA, the Golden Age, which DC Comics seems intent on killing.

For the record, in the 1930s science fiction heroes FLASH GORDON and BUCK ROGERS, plus white Jungle Heroes & westerns dominated. Superman debuted in Action Comics in 1938, so before that, comic strips and pulp novels were the sources for superhero action to be transferred to film. Your 1930s section mentioned these serials. I've listed the year in which they came out: BLACKHAWK (1952), CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT (1942), PHANTOM (1943), SPY SMASHER (1942), CAPTAIN AMERICA (1943), MANDRAKE (1939), SHADOW (1937), and VIGILANTE (1946).

The Shadow had no costume in his first two films (1937, '38), though he debuted in full regalia in his first serial in 1940. Actor playing these "mystery men" were Kirk Alyn as Blackhawk, Dick Purcell as Captain America, Dave O'Brien as Captain Midnight Richard Webb - Ben Finney of STAR TREK played the role on TV), Warren Hull as Mandrake (and the Spider & Green Hornet #2) Tim Tyler as the Phantom, Rod La Rocque as the Shadow, (Victor Jory in the serials), Kane Richmond as Spy Smasher and Ralph Byrd (Mr. Dick Tracy) as Vigilante. He even sings too.

I recommend the "Encyclopedia of Super Heroes" by Jeff Rovin and "Comic Book Heroes of the Screen" by William Shoell. They are excellent references.

Tony Young
Hawaii



Mariska Hargitay, the beautiful daughter of Jayne Mansfield stars in MIGHTY MORPHIN POWER RANGERS: THE MOVIE



Reliving the thrills of ULTRAMAN, Part 1

ULTRA SCAN

Now wipe that drool from your mouths, Ultra fans, you don't want to dampen the second edition of "Ultra-Scan", H.O.F.'s continuing look at what is most likely the most important genre ever to hit superhero TV. To start things off, naturally I'm doing this here indepth look at ULTRAMAN, even though ULTRA Q predated it and officially set the pace (but ULTRA Q is a sci-fi series, not a superhero series and is out-of-place in this glorious magazine you're so fortunate to have before you) for the whole Ultra legacy. This is actually a two-part look at the show, to be continued next issue. As for the "Ultra-Scan" of HOF #4, it will of course, concentrate on the ULTRASEVEN program, and later RETURN OF ULTRAMAN, then ULTRAMAN ACE, and so on.

ULTRAMAN

(URUTORAMAN) Produced by Tsuburaya Productions, Series Creator: Eiji Tsuburaya, Consisting of 39 half-hour full color episodes, lasting from 7/10/66 until 4/9/67, Broadcast on TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting Service), Main Writer: Tetsuo Kinjo, Main Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Music: Kunio Miyauchi (who also did music for ULTRA Q and THE HUMAN VAPOR, though little of his tunes reached the English version, and music from both was later re-used in ULTRAMAN. He supplied all the songs for GODZILLA'S REVENGE too), Executive Producer: Eiji Tsuburaya, Cast: Satoshi Furuya as Ultraman (costumed form), Susumu Kurobe as Hayata, Hiroko Sakurai as Fuji, Akiji Kobayashi (aka "Shoji" Kobayashi) as Captain Mura, Masaya Nihei as Ito, Yoshi Ishi (aka Mitao Dokumimashi & Sandayu Dokumamushi; his stage name) as Arashi, and Akihiko Hirata as Dr. Sakai Iwamoto, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Though I fondly remember ULTRAMAN as a major force in my childhood, the series seemed as popular with the mainstream as an Ed Gein cookbook. While BATMAN and SUPERMAN were familiar pop icons all over the world, ULTRAMAN, an equally (if not more so) important series seems suspiciously absent in most nostalgic salutes to TV of the past. If ULTRAMAN was really so insignificant so as not to be remembered, answer me this: Did the SUPERMAN series generate tons of sequel programs? Was there a "Superseven", Superman Ace", "Superman Taro", "Superman Leo", "Superman Joe", "Superman 80", "Andro Melrose", "Superfight" or "Superman Powered"? Though few of the Ultra sequels reached yankee shores, their very existence proves Ultraman himself to be one of the world's most prolific superheroes. One of the few references to ULTRAMAN was in Gary Gerani & Paul H. Schulman's book Fantastic Television (Harmony Books; 1977), which also preserved useful data on anything from THE AVENGERS to NIGHT GALLERY. Sadly, ULTRAMAN's review was microscopic by comparison, and this groundbreaking, brilliant show was dismissed as a "ludicrous live action series from Japan", yet ELECTRA WOMAN & DYNA GIRL was called "Electrafantastic!" So much for taste.

What few other ULTRAMAN reviews there were in the geeky mainstream were similarly negative; usually written by the poor, uninitiated, non-imaginative jerks who just can't appreciate the fun of a metalic-looking giant who clobbers mutant reptiles, with help from soldiers, ray guns, jet planes, etc. Over the years, rarely could we Ultra addicts read an article on ULTRAMAN and not feel defensive and have an instinctive chip on our shoulder. Well, HOF's existence will hopefully bring us into the 21st century and stomp out those old attitudes. Time for Ultra fans to come out of the closet, there's nothing wrong with being an Ultra fan, it's about time everybody wakes up! ULTRAMAN is one of the few programs on American TV which could truly be considered, "for the whole family". Most shows & movies which use this motto would indicate that everyone in the "whole family" must be nine years old, but ULTRAMAN offered violence, occasional bloodshed and scientific plots which many kiddies couldn't understand. If you don't like ULTRAMAN and its successors, you can go suck on a used tampon, for all I care.

ULTRAMAN was numero uno, when it comes to combining Eiji Tsuburaya's Godzillian FX with high-tech superheroes.

Though technically, SPACE GIANTS (aka "Goldar", "Maguma Taishi", & "Ambassador Magma") predated ULTRAMAN by a few months, ULTRAMAN came closer to perfecting the concept and in the long run, became far more succesful, memorable, influential, widespread and other big words I often use in the wrong context. An extremely inspirational, copied concept was founded in ULTRAMAN-- a Japanese guy (in Japan; there are lots of Japanese over there!) is a member of a futuristic squad of raygun-toting soldiers who always seem to wear helmets. They try to rid the Earth of overgrown beasts, and when they fail, our protagonist changes into a humongous, streamlined avenger resembling an android, who's wrestling & beams defeat the giant villain of the episode. UTLRAMAN basically founded this concept, which became one of the most repeated formulas on Japanese TV in the 1960s and 1970s.

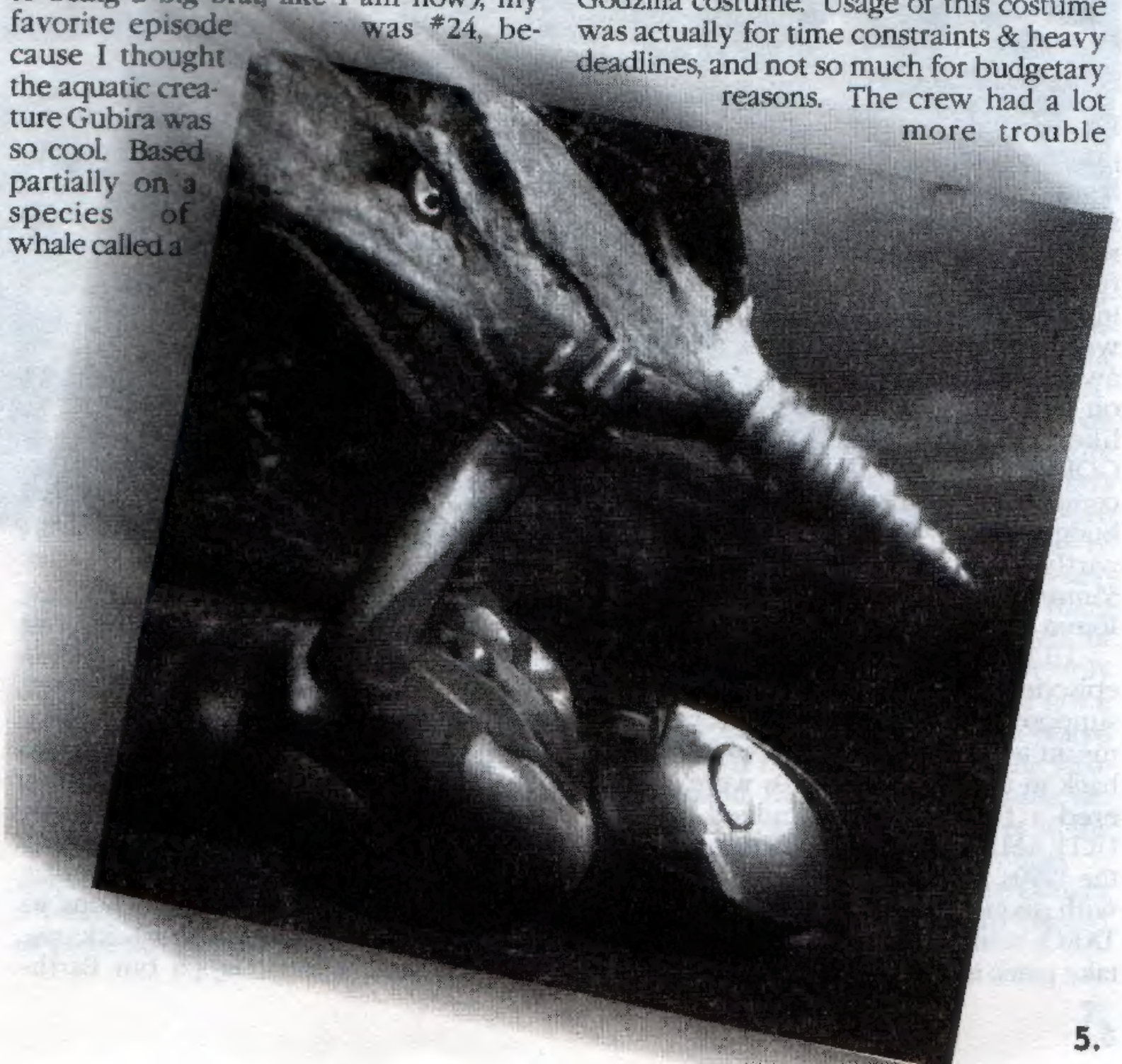
Watching this classic series, it's not hard to see why this show succeeded, and Eurasian remakes like ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO and ULTRAMAN: TOWARD THE FUTURE failed. While Dore Kraus and Cane Kosugi had the potential to be as charismatic as Susumu Kurobe's Hayata character, the flawed directing & writing insured that our two English speaking "Ultramen" could never live up to ULTRAMAN's Hayata or ULTRASEVEN's Dan Moroboshi. In ULTRAMAN, Hayata's transformation into the metalic giant was always an exciting occasion. It was quick, sudden, colorful and highlighted by energetic, military-ish theme music. However, in its vastly inferior follow-up, ULTRAMAN: TOWARD THE FUTURE, Jack Shindo simply looks (unenthusiastically, as though he's as bored as his audience) into a pendant, and gradually fades into Ultraman Great ("Ultraman Lame" would be a better name), for what it's worth; all 'highlighted' by dull music that falls inbetween STAR WARS ripoff tunes, elevator muzac and the national anthem! Hayata's transformation was often gripping; he'd lose his Beta Capsul and have to compromise to get to it. In one, it falls off a bridge and is at least 30 feet below him, on a ledge. Meanwhile, the monster is on the rampage! So Hayata makes one hell of a gamble, he jumps down, knowing that as he quickly falls, he'll have only one chance to grab that Beta Capsul before falling the remaining 100 feet or whatever. If he doesn't catch it, he won't become Ultraman, he'll instead fall to his death! In episode #33, Mephilas freezes Hayata solid, just as he's about to push the button on the Beta Capsul. For a while, all seems hopeless, but Hayata's stiff-as-a-brick body is accidently knocked forward, and the impact causes the button to be pressed after all, and Japan is saved.

ULTRAMAN: TOWARD THE FUTURE offered none of this, and as I understand it, the dismally inferior ULTRAMAN: THE ULTIMATE HERO is even more lame & generic, lacking any of the feel & heart of this original, classic 1966 series.

ULTRAMAN isn't perfect, however. But that's to be expected, I mean, perfect is a myth; there's no such thing as perfect--except of course for your taste in magazines. But seriously, the rushed scripts of ULTRAMAN make it seem as though there are already monsters everywhere, origins of several are never explained. It's kind of like Hong Kongese horror films where they assume ghosts & vampires are commonplace. Another problem with ULTRAMAN, and one which I'm sure you all know, ULTRAMAN was basically made for kids. Though many adults enjoy it too (there are plenty of superhero programs more infantile than ULTRAMAN!), I must admit that I got the most fun out of the show when I was a kiddy. But then again, what actually defines a kiddy show? There are plenty of kiddies who watch Football and BEVERLY HILLS 90210, which I think are for idiots.

Today, one of my favorite episodes of ULTRAMAN is #28, it's impressive & suspenseful despite the villainous Da Da faces looking like paper mache Cleopatra masks (the bizarre, abstract look of the Da Das was based on some old art movement called Da Da, from France or someplace). But when I was a little brat (as opposed to being a big brat, like I am now), my favorite episode was #24, because I thought the aquatic creature Gubira was so cool. Based partially on a species of whale called a Narwall [known for its unicorn-like tusk], Gubira (a variation on 'Kujira' the Japanese word for whale) carried this sharp, protruding instrument a step further; the spike can spin like a drill! As a child, this fascinated me-- to think that a creature could have a spinning nose that could dig tunnels underground! Pretty soon I was 'borrowing' drills from my family's tool box, and making holes in boards, trees, walls, and my house. I began making up my own stories of Gubira coming back as a good guy, and designing several monsters (one of which beared a striking resemblence to Kurogaras, from KIKAIDER #35) of my own who had drills sticking out of their faces. Another interesting note about the episode is that I believe the irritating little caucasian girl later grew up to be an attractive model or singer, and at least at some point in the early 1980s, lived just a few miles from me in Northern California's East Bay! Like an idiot, I never pushed these inquiries further, as that would have been one hell of an interview! All I can recall is a neighbor of hers, who used to act in my videos, called me and asked, "Damon, was there ever a young American girl in ULTRAMAN? There's some cute chick nearby, and her sister told me her sister was in ULTRAMAN, but I can't remember the episode".

A popular episode with Godzilla techno-geeks is #10, because the monster Kira/Girass is just a thinly disquised Godzilla costume. Usage of this costume was actually for time constraints & heavy deadlines, and not so much for budgetary reasons. The crew had a lot more trouble



doing ULTRAMAN than ULTRA Q. Where as ULTRAMAN was filmed more-or-less on a weekly basis (allowing for immediate response from viewers, in the form of fan mail), ULTRA Q's episodes were all filmed in one year, and the day the first episode of ULTRA Q debuted on TV, the whole show was already completed (so they didn't have to rush to meet weekly deadlines). But when they started filming ULTRAMAN, they had just five days to complete each episode. One of the main costume makers was the talented Ryusaku Takayama, but even he felt the pressure of coming out with another monster design every week. Despite advance planning, it was sometimes necessary for Eiji Tsuburaya to go borrow props from Toho.



I gather not just anyone from TBS could just barge in and get a Godzilla costume from Toho. But Eiji was well respected, since his creations like Godzilla are what really made Toho internationally successful. Supposedly, the late FX wizard's clout intimidated a few people at Toho, and they were rather relieved when he passed away! Now they could cut the budgets on everything, which explains why the likes of GODZILLA VS. GIGAN and GODZILLA VS. MEGALON were so cheap compared to the 1960s stuff. ULTRAMAN's budget was lower than that of ULTRA Q, partly because ULTRA Q was shot in 35mm, and ULTRAMAN was filmed in 16mm film stock.

ULTRAMAN episode #23 is the only episode which hints at when the show is suppose to take place. It appears it was meant to be set around 1993 or 1995, since back in the 1960s, the 1990s were considered a futuristic time indeed. But if ULTRAMAN is indeed meant to be set in the 1990s, it kind of screws up continuity with sequel programs like ULTRAMAN TARO, which were obviously meant to take place in the 1970s. Oh well, the 1970s bellbottom pants are coming back, and the awful hair styles still might make a comeback, which I suppose could put ULTRAMAN LEO or ULTRAMAN TARO in the 1990s too. Of course, nobody can predict fashion, it seems that if ever there was a period ULTRAMAN could be set in other than the 1960s, it would have to have been the 1980s (because of all the 1960s throw back stuff, i.e. short hair, etc.).

It's easy to think of the cast of ULTRAMAN officially debuting in this series; that's how most of us came to identify them. But I believe all had done some acting before ULTRAMAN. Susumu Kurobe (Hayata) can also be seen in GHIDRAH THE THREE HEADED MONSTER, KING KONG ESCAPES and WHAT'S UP TIGER LILLY, and would later appear in DESTROY ALL MONSTERS and KAMEN RIDER BLACK.

Hiroko Sakurai (Fuji, called "Akiko Fuji" in the Japanese version) first appeared in ULTRA Q as Yuriko Edogawa, a regular character. Masaya Nihei, who plays Ito the idiot, can also be seen in MIGHTY JACK, GORATH, and WARING CLANS.

In the early 1960s, the first hint of ULTRAMAN can be traced to some story called WOO. Exactly what it was I'm not certain, but much of ULTRA Q and ULTRAMAN were based on it. WOO (the name was also later reused in ULTRAMAN, for an Abominable Snowman in episode #30), whatever it was, laid down the groundwork for what would become ULTRA Q (TBS; 1965), a B&W Tsuburaya TV series which attempted to be a series of half-hour salutes to Toho movies like RODAN, GORATH, ATTACK OF THE MUSHROOM PEOPLE, VARAN THE UNBELIEVABLE, and other sci-fi oneshots. As such, this classic sci-fi series was sort of a "Japanese Dr. Who", or better yet, a combination of OUTER LIMITS & TWILIGHT ZONE but with continuing characters. For the second season, the concept of man-against-monster was carried a step further with ULTRAMAN, thanks to the addition of full color and a futuristic superhero. ULTRAMAN is a sequel to ULTRA Q in every way, a few monsters appear in both programs, and the very beginning of all the Japanese ULTRAMAN episodes even read "Ultra Q", before it abruptly changes to "Ultraman"!

WOO actually was similar in story to what we would later call ULTRAMAN. It too dealt with a helpful alien who came to Earth, but was not a humanoid alien, but a reptilian monster from Andromeda. The creature was to be called Bemular, and this name was the only thing which survived into the first episode; though as a villain. This original reptilian Bemular was rejected by Tsuburaya Productions, so the basic design was taken to Nikkatsu, who changed it into Gappa (an Earth-dwelling monster) in 1967's MONSTER FROM A PREHISTORIC PLANET. As for ULTRAMAN, there was plenty of evolving before a prototype was agreed upon. Some earlier designs were of aliens, but without the benevolent look the producers were expecting. An abundance of stripes, spikes, & possibly claws were tossed around, and the character got stripped down to a less sinister-looking character; everyone eventually opted for the streamlined metallic look which has since become universal. One of the last things added to Ultraman's design was the Warning Light– the rest, like the stripes, came first. It also took several name changes, at one point the character was going to be called "Red Man", a name which would later be used for a different,



completely independent series.

Now really, is there anybody out there unfamiliar with this TV show's script? Must I once again tell you it's about a 40-meter high, mach 5 flying, silver & red cop from Nebula M78 who helps the Science Patrol wipe out an assortment of giant monsters? Must I tell you that the Science Patrol is an advanced army consisting of Captain Mura ('Muramashi' in the Japanese version), weapons designer Ito ('Ide'), female communications officer Fuji, and trigger happy sharpshooter Arashi? If so, I guess I might as well also tell you their most valuable member is Hayata, who's got a secret identity as title hero Ultraman. This is all stuff I've re-hashed over the years in my older magazine ORIENTAL CINEMA, but I suppose it won't hurt if I go through it all again. The Science Patrol has an abundance of weapons & vehicles which they use to insure rare, endangered species of monsters become extinct: the S16 submarine, a jet plane/spaceship called "Hydro-Geneto Rocket" (or something like that), and assorted missiles and guns. One thing about the story I've never mentioned before is that in the Japanese version, little

kid Hoshino (called Osamu Hoshino in the Japanese version, so Hoshino is his last name!) is not Fuji's brother, that was only in the English dubbing.

What follows are all the episodes, in order of broadcast. This is not, however, the order they were made in. Some were actually filmed out of sequence.

1. **ULTRA OPERATION NO. 1** (URUTORA SAKUSEN DAI-ICHIGO) {Broadcast date: 7/17/66}
FIRST SHOT: Balls in space.

Not the best episode, but this pilot gets the show off on a decent start, as we see spaceships, a jet, submarine, torpedoes, and raygun firing. The story shows how Ultraman came to Earth and merges with



Hayata to destroy Bemlar, sort of a spiny salamander who walks on his hind legs. The only problems with this fight are Ito's annoying interruptions, and it looks too much like Ultraman is trying to make love with Bemlar. Also watch for an early dubbing error: Hayata says: "I've spoted UFO flying east, over the Gobari Forest." Arashi marks this down on a map before Hayata reveals the location. Is Arashi psychic?

Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo & Shinichi Sekizawa, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Special Effects Dir.: Koichi Takano. {NOTE: This was actually the nineth episode filmed, not the first.} **

2. **BLAST THE INVADERS** (SHINRYAKUSHA-O UTE) {7/24/66}
FIRST SHOT: Science Patrol Headquarters.

Here's a wierd episode, as Ito talks to the camera (us) and has some flashback about how he got a black eye. There are other stupid antics (and awkward dialogue) like Ito's "space language", which sounds suspiciously like Japanese. But the episode is cool regardless, as it officially introduces those villainous space lobsters the Baltans! Scenario: Masahiko Yamada, Dir.: Toshihiro Iijima, Special FX Dir.: Tetsu Matoba. {NOTE: Though broadcast second, this was the first episode produced.} **1/2

3. **SCIENCE PATROL MOVE OUT** (KATOKUTAI SHUGEKI-SEYO) {7/31/66}
F.S.: Castle.

Hoshino & Fuji decide to investigate some legend, explore a well, and encounter some electric, invisible dinosaur called Nelonga (aka Neronga). Its body is that of Baragon (costume from FRANKENSTIEN CONQUERS THE WORLD), and it absorbs energy from local power plants. Watch for a dubbing error; Arashi starts speaking with Captain Mura's voice! Scenario: Masahiko Yamada, Dir.: Toshihiro Iijima, FX Dir.: Tetsu Matoba. **

4. **DETENATION: FIVE SECONDS** (DAI-BAKUHATSU GO-BYO MAE) {8/7/66}
F.S.: Rocket blasting off (stock footage from THE MYSTERIANS).

What starts off as a watchable tale of Ragon (a retarded "Creature from the Black Lagoon" who wears a nuclear bomb as a pendant) later has Fuji babysitting Michiko & Hoshino, so it all gets pretty infantile. In one ridiculous yet funny scene, the Science Patrol uses music to soothe the savage Ragon, but the not so-jolly green giant isn't impressed. A few nice matte FX and flooding miniatures manage to make this chapter somewhat worth watching. Scenario Ryu Minamikawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, FX Dir.: Koichi Takano. *1/2

5. **SECRET OF THE MILOGANDAR** (MIROGANDA NO HIMITSU) {8/14/66}
FS: Staring wheel of a crashing truck.

Dr. Sakai (Akihiko Hirata) helps determine that Dr. Yamada has used radiation and cross-breeding, resulting in the monstrous plant Greenmons. An okay episode, except for one stupid scene: Arashi accidently punches an over-acting Ito twice, and the second time, he obviously misses him by a mile. Interesting to note that during a flashback, everything is in B&W except a flower (a main point in the script). Scenario: Keisuke Fujikawa, Dir.: Toshihiro Iijima, FX: Tetsu Matoba {NOTE: This is the second episode produced.}**

6. **THE COASTAL PATROL COMMAND** {8/21/66}
FS: Fuji removing headphones.

This is stupid, I recall this disillusioning episode as a kiddie. Episode #6 presented a turning point for me when I was a twerp; though young I instantly said, "Ridiculous!" outloud when we got our first look at Brazilian aqua lizard Guezra (actually a re-decorated Pita costume from ULTRA Q #26). From that point on I no longer considered this series flawless. This is no classic episode, the monster looks stupid, the kiddies (Hoshino and friends) are nauseating, and there's a pointless, out-of-place subplot about a diamond smuggler called 'Diamond Kick' (Hisaya Ito), of all things. When Arashi first hears a monster has been seen, he laughs it off and says the kid has been watching too much TV. Yet there are monsters everywhere in this show, so you'd think Arashi would take this warning (of a frequent occurance) more seriously. Also, Guezra, apparently a monster who benefits the chocolate industry (hhmmmm, I thought this Snickers tasted kinda' funny! It's lizard droppings! Gag!) is said to be a "good monster, yet Ultraman tears off one of its little tentacles & kills it anyway. Go figure. Scenario: Masahiko Yamada, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, FX: Koichi Takano {NOTE: Fifth episode produced.}*

7. **THE BLUE STONE OF VALLARGE** (BALAJI NO AOI-SHI) {8/28/66}
FS: Meteroite crashing into sand.

Adam Jeffers, a non-evil American joins the Science Patrol on a mission to the Middle Eastern (looks more Tibetan, actually) village of Vallarge, in the desert. The town's beautiful princess shows them a mysterious statue of Ultraman holding a bomb-like weapon. It's believed Ultraman himself left this device there, so the village would have defense against a large, sand-dwelling antlion called Antlar (a cool, realistic insect and/or crustacean, and it isn't at all laughable). Though Ultraman battles this huge bug, it's when Capt. Mura throws the magic rock that Antlar suffers defeat. A different, interesting, cool episode. Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo & Ryu Minamikawa, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, FX: Koichi Takano ***1/2

8. **THE VIOLENT MONSTER REGION** {9/4/66}
FS: A ship.

The Science Patrol comes to the aid of a sole surviving scientist at Tadara Island, populated by prehistoric monsters and maneating plants! Yep, this is an outstanding episode, with at least three giant monsters: Red King, Magrah and Chandra, who's costume is actually of Pegira (ULTRA Q #14) but with horns added. Another old costume used again is the Garamon costume (ULTRA Q #13), who's now the friendly, cute, adorable yet short-lived Pigmon. Hell, with this island of monsters, they could have easily had several episodes take place here, since there could have been several cool monsters for Ultraman to fight. But Ultraman only fights Red King, who's neither red nor a king, and looks more like a rock-plated allosaurus. A fun tale, but watch the Japanese version; there's an uncut battle between Red King and Chandora, yet all the gore was cut from the American dub.

Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo & Shozo Uehara, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, FX: Koichi Takano. *****

9. **OPERATION: URANIUM** (DENKO ISHIKA SAKUSEN) {9/11/66}
FS: Lightning & storms on the high seas.

Gaborah, a flower-headed, uranium eating monster with fangs like Gamera and a body like Baragon causes havoc at some mountaineer school where all the boys wear stupid hats and sing terribly. Just another average monster-on-the-loose yarn, with Gaborah's origin never explained, and instead the emphasis is on the mountaineering kids and Hayata in a helicoptor trying to lure Gaborah away from the boys' camp. Scenario: Masahiko Yamada, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, FX: Koichi Takano. {NOTE: 7th episode filmed.} **

10. **ENIGMA OF THE DINOSAUR BASE** (NAZO NO KYORU KICHI) {9/18/66}
FS: Moon at night, over Lake Kitiyama.

The by now infamous episode where



a Godzilla costume is mildly altered to be used as Kira (called "Jiras", aka "Girass" in the Japanese version), a nocturnal lake monster created by some wierd scientist. The scientist, called both Nakano & Makaido seems not only rude (he breaks a reporter's cigarette lighter for no reason), but stupid too; in one scene, he shows a crudely drawn picture of a triceratops and says: "This is the stegosaurus, it also is one of the world's most dangerous monsters!" But this episode is a lot of fun, it's funny to see Ultraman battle what's obviously Godzilla, despite additional scales on the neck and a different roar. In the Japanese version, the scaley frill is ripped off Kira's/Godzilla's neck and Ultraman uses it like a red cape, and both giants engage in a game of bullfighting. This whole scene is abruptly (and obviously) cut from the American version, as is part of Kira's final death scene; blood dripping from the poor creature's mouth. Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo, Dir.: Kazuho Mitsuta, FX: Koichi Takano. ***

11. **THE MISCHEAVIOUS RASCAL FROM SPACE** (UCHU KARAKITA ABARENBO) {9/25/66}
FS: Panning shot at city, and stupid close-ups of school girls eating.

This entire episode is comical, but not funny. It's a dumb tale of irritating kiddies finding a magic stone from space which falls into the hands of some criminal. The power-hungry thief turns the rock into marauding monster Gango, who looks like a screwed up teddy bear, but with horns which constantly spin. Even the battle between Ultraman and Gango is full of infantile humor. Valued only for a cool miniature city and brief glimpses of babes in a swimming pool. Scenario: Tatsuo Miyata, Dir.: Kazuho Mitsuta, FX: Koichi Takano. {NOTE: 12th episode filmed.} **

12. **CRY OF THE MUMMY** (MIIRA NO SAKEBE) {10/2/66}
FS: Exterior of a cave.

Here's a pretty cool episode. An excavation crew unearths a pointy eared, ape-like mummy in a cave, and nothing is explained about it! The best definition comes from Arashi: "A weird looking little monster!" Electricity awakens this strange creature, who goes on a rampage in the lab and fires rays from its eyes. Arashi's raygun destroys it, but guess what?! From the mummy's cave emerges a giant, rubbery horse monster called Dodongo, who sounds like Mothra! Ultraman destroys it, and other than the fact that Dodongo was apparently the mummy's friend, the whole story remains mysterious. Scenario: Keisuke Fujikawa, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Special Visual Effects: Hajime Tsuburaya {NOTE: 11th episode completed.} **1/2

13. **OIL S.O.S.** (OIRU S.O.S.) {10/9/66}
FS: Burning oil tanks.

The generous rating of a whole star is because of nice firey miniatures (i.e. burning ship) and an excellent miniature oil refinery. Sadly, the two-bodied, one headed bat monster Pestar is just too damn ridiculous! There's an actor in each 'wing', making this oil-drinking, fire-spitting bat look like two separate entities! After Ultraman abruptly kills the already half-dead (because of a fire it started) Pestar, Ultraman puts out the oil fire, by spraying water from his hands. It doesn't take an eagle eye to spot the obvious garden hose dangling from Ultraman's leg. One more thing. Ito accidently fires a missile and feels bad about it. Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Special Visual FX: Hajime Tsuburaya. *

14. **THE PEARL DEFENSE DIRECTIVE** {10/16/66}
FS: Pearls.

This lame episode wouldn't exactly score points with feminists, with lines like: "I didn't know you were so girl-ish." At an all-time low, Fuji pleads with reptilian pearl-eater Gamakujira (a flabby cross between an alligator, frog and Rush Limbaugh) to give her at least one pearl and is scoffed at by her male characters, so she says: "You do not understand a woman's emotions!" Her obsession with pearls is treated like a life or death situation. Environmentalists wouldn't be particularly impressed by this sappy, 'cute' episode either, for the way the Science Patrol is absolutely determined to wipe out an endangered species so materialistic bitches can wear pearls! Despite some clever cinematography, this is a weak episode, climaxing when the Science Patrol shoves a missile up the poor, misunderstood dinosaur's poop-shoot, sending him flying to his death– a head on collision with flying Ultraman! Scenario: Mamoru Sasaki, Dir.: Akio Jissoji, FX: Koichi Takano {NOTE: 15th episode.} *

15. **TERROR OF THE COSMIC RAYS** (KYOFU NO UCHU-SEN) {10/23/66}



FS: Childrens' drawings of monsters Nelonga, Red King, ULTRA Q's Kanegon, and Bethoven!

Cosmic rays just happen to hit some dumb kid's (who talks like SPEED RACER's Trixie) drawing of monster Gabadon, bringing it to life, in this cute, witty little episode. But it's also depressing, Gabadon is absolutely harmless and peaceful, all he does is sleep! Yet because he's different, the Science Patrol & big bully Ultraman insist on harassing the innocent victim Gabadon! At least Ultraman doesn't kill him, he sends him back up to the stars where he came from. Scenario: Mamoru Sasaki, Dir.: Akio Jissoji, FX: Koichi Takano. {NOTE: 14th.}**

16. **SCIENCE PATROL INTO SPACE** (KATOKUTAI UCHU-E) {10/30/66}
FS: Rocket.

Them eerie space lobsters, the Baltans have captured an Earth rocket and posessed the scientist in it. While the Science Patrol zooms into space for a rescue mission, more Baltans attack Earth! Meanwhile, the Science Patrol gets briefly stranded on Planet R. Using his cool, rarely scene 'teleportation' technique, Ultraman

manages to destroy Baltans both on Earth and Planet R, before Dr. Iwamoto's (Akihiko Hirata) rocket brings everyone back to Earth. Despite Ito's utter stupidity (he gets overly excited- watching an astronaut eat!), this is generally a cool, slick episode, reaching the epic seriousness of a Toho sci-fi film on occasion. Scenario: Kitao Senzoku, Dir.: Toshihrio Iijima, FX: Koichi Takano. {NOTE: 17th.} ***

17. **PASSPORT TO INFINITY** (MUGEN-E NO PASUPOTO) {11/6/66}
FS: Sir Yesterday's face.

A London scientist with the unlikely name of Sir Yesterday discovers meteorites which sprout TV antennas, and alter dimensions as we know them- resulting in wacky confusion for Ito (who gets somewhat funny for once). Not only that, but these blue meteors unite to form Bluton, part jelly-fish and part landmine; whick makes use of common kitchen utensils, hand mixers! Pretty stupid, but this uninteresting monster is one of Ultrman's tougher opponents. Scenario: Keisuke Fujikawa, Dir.: Toshihiro Iijima, FX: Koichi Takano. {16th} *1/2

18. **BROTHER FROM ANOTHER WORLD** (YUSEI-KARAKITA KYODAI) {11/13/66}
FS: Haze, a myst.

Alien invader Zorab is hard to understand because excessive echoing distorts his voice. At first he seems to call us "brothers", but Hayata discovers Zorab is hypnotising people to be his slaves. Zorab uses some sort of molecular transformation to impersonate Ultraman, but the eyes are different. This is a well written episode, and Ultraman's duel with his imposter is cool, so it's a personal favorite of mine. {19th} ****

19. **THE DEVIL INCARNATE** (AKUMA WA FUTABABE) {11/20/66}
FS: Broadcast tower and/or telephone pole, pan down.

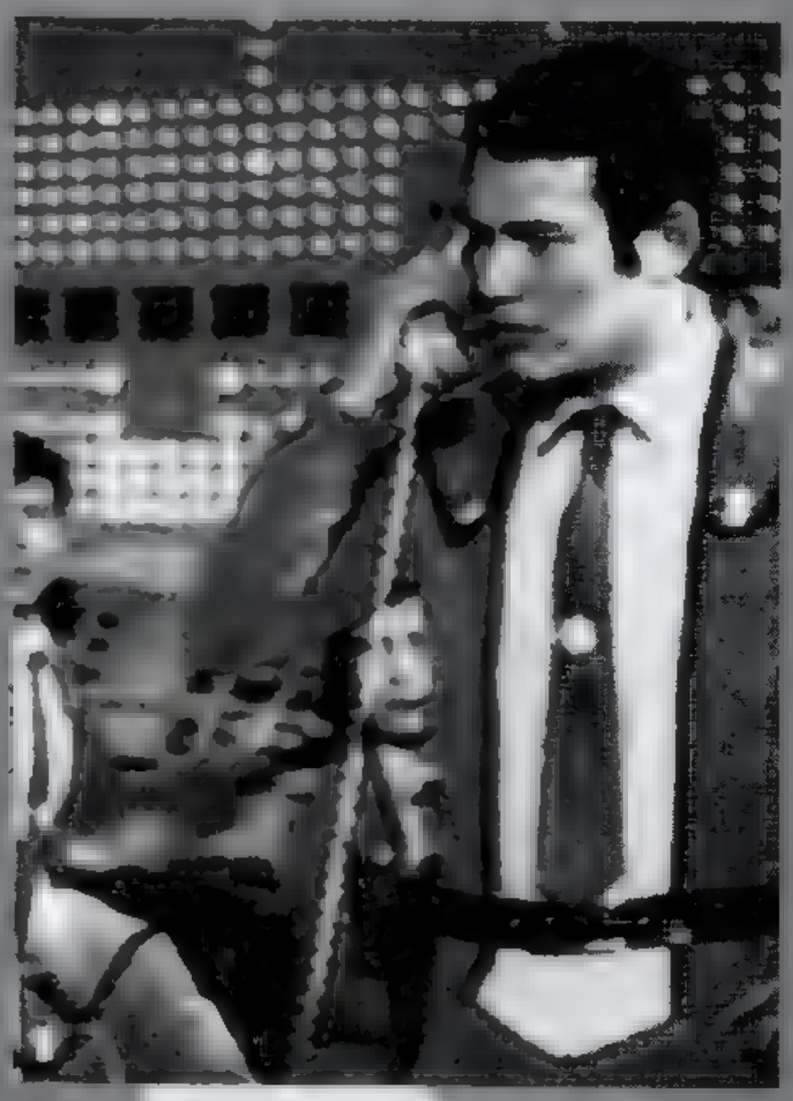
Avoras and Banira, two mutant dinosaurs hatch from what appears to be ancient time capsules from outerspace. After uncoding the secret message, in a Mu continent-like writing, it's discovered an ancient, extinct race of advanced humans had in fact reduced both destructive monsters and tried to dispose of them in the capsuls. At first, both rubber reptiles battle each other, before Ultraman takes on the winner. This is a fun episode, with a Toho-monster movie feel to it; both giants cause destruction before engaging in a Godzillian duel with each other– and for once, Ito is allowed to seem remotely, semi-intelligent. {18th.} ***

20. **TERROR ON ROUTE 87** (KYOFU NO RUTO 87) {11/27/66}
FS: Pyrameds at night.

Hydrah the Dragon comes to life to avenge little kids killed in hit & run auto accidents. An intriguing episode, and with the bird-like Hydrah, one of Ultraman's least laughable opponents. Interesting to note that Ultraman allows the monster to escape unharmed, despite all the truck drivers it has killed! Special Visual Effects: Koichi Takano, Dir.: Yuzo Higuchi. **1/2

21. **BREECH THE WALL OF SMOKE** {12/4/66}
FS: Meadow, then waterfall.

Standard monster-on-the-loose stuff, with military attacks on the monster, and nice scenes of the giant beast destroying buildings. The script deals with dense fog, dead pidgeons and then tremmors-- which can mean only one thing; Kemular! Kemular is a pretty cool monster, generally four footed and looking like a salamander [with teeth] and a fish tail, and two wing-like (flightless) appendages on its back. An average episode, but the ending has the Science Patrol visiting Fuji in the hospital (due to a minor injury), allowing for more lame, corny dailogue. **



22. **PLOT TO DESTROY THE SURFACE WORLD** {12/11/66}
FS: Radar scanner, spinning.

Abnormal episode, in that the theme music/sound FX from the beginning (the swirly paint FX) are heard repeatedly through out the episode. The story is interesting, but the villains (sinister subteranean humans) seem to be people with bandaids over their eyes, or are the bandaids suppose to actually be their eyes?! Anyway, they need slaves, so they sicked their giant, pointy snouted, fire-spitting dinosaur Telesdon (who only comes out at night) on Japan. The ending fight between Ultraman and Telesdon is okay, but is a little too dark; it's set at night. {23rd.} **

23. **THE EARTH IS MY HOME** (FURUSATO-WA CHIKYU) {12/18/66}
FS: Flags of all the nations.

Invisible mutant Jamila was once an Earthling astronaut but now he's mad that some sort of rocket crash deformed him into a giant, funny looking monster. So he's attacking other countrys' delegates & representatives of the space program. Jamila's wrestling bout against Ultraman is energetic, but it's hard not to feel sorry for this unfortunate victim, especially during a rather long, painful death. His all-too-human-like roars add a certain eeriness to this serious, insightful episode. Interesting to note that on Jamila's grave, the years 1960-1993 are engraved. It never occured to me before that this show takes place in the 1990s! I must say, we haven't progressed as much as the show thinks we would have. Though we have reached the moon, the closest thing to Science Patrol rayguns we have today are stunguns and maybe pepper-spray. {22} ***

24. **THE UNDERSEA SCIENCE CENTER** (KAITEI KAGAKU-KICHI) {12/25/66}
FS: Science Patrol jet blasting off.

An irritating little American girl, like Hoshino's stupid facial expressions detract from an otherwise decent episode about an undersea laboratory menaced by Gubira, a drill-nosed monster. **1/2

25. **TSUIFON- THE ROGUE COMET** (KAI-TSUISEI TSUIFUON) {1/1/67}
FS: Comet 24, in space.

Toho fans should get a kick out of this classic, since it has the same type of fun, rubber monster battles as seen in many a Godzilla flick! Though Gigas looks like a retarded yeti, and there's talky filler about a comet and H-bombs, it's still emmensley entertaining! But again Ultraman only fights Red King, who he's fought before! Why not have Ultraman take on Gigas, or the cool-looking Drako? Hell, how come Ultraman never took on two or three monsters at once? Perhaps we'll never know the answers, but this is still one of my favorite episodes! Scenario: Bunzo Wakatsuki, Dir.: Toshihiro Iijima, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. ****

26. **THE GRAND MONSTER** [part one] (KAIJU DENKA) {1/8/67}
FS: Kids walking on a sidewalk.

This is the only two-part story in ULTRAMAN, even though it's a very simple story; more than similar to KING KONG. It's also a perfect example of what's wrong with the show; innocent, extinct creatures (who harm nobody) are treated as evil monsters and wiped out of existence by "our heroes" Ultraman and the

Science Patrol. In this one, the Gohorasaurus (Japanese: "Gomora", sometimes spelled "Gamorah") is awakened from its prehistoric slumber in some uninhabited jungle (though it has more of them 'Sufurans', the man-eating plants seen in episode #8), kidnapped via net and Science Patrol jets, then dropped two thousand feet! A time wasting subplot comes to you courtesy of Hajime, a little boy who draws monsters, calls himself King Creature and wears a paper mask resembling a 'Gremlin' from that 1980s movie. Despite the episode's flaws, it features a decent amount of FX and a cool monster. This is the only episode where we never actually see Hayata become Ultraman, though Ultraman does make an appearance to get his butt kicked by Gohora.

Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo & Bunzo Wakatsuki, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. **

27. **THE GRAND MONSTER** [part two] (KAIJU DENKA)
FS: Jet blasting off (flashback).

Poor misguided subteranean monster Gohora continues his rampage in Japan, so the Science Patrol shoots off his tail! Meanwhile, twerp Hajime, aka "King Creature" returns Hayata's Beta Capsul (Hayata lost it in the previous episode) so that Ultraman can break off Gohora's horn and die a painful death. If nothing else, these two episodes represented turning points for me as a kiddie. Episode 26 has Gohora stomping around miniature tractors, which beared a striking resemblence to my own Tonka toys at the time. It was at this point (I was around 5 or 6) I realized I'd been had. Yet episode 27 features a super-imposed matte, Hayata in the foreground, and Gohora in the background, destroying a castle. This had me confused, as a child, I just couldn't grasp that this was faked! Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo & Bunzo Wakatsuki, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. **

28. **HUMAN SPECIMENS 5 & 6** (Ningen 5 & 6)
FS: Bus on a road, near mountains.

Though the Da Das are absolutely stupid-looking (paper mache masks and a wet suit painted white), this is a suspenseful, slick episode about alien abduction, possibly my favorite episode, and one which enthralled me as a tiny tot. For one thing, we actually get to see Captain Mura fight of a Da Da or two while protecting a lady scientist at the Space Institute. Ultraman briefly shrinks down to human size (yet falls on his butt doing so) to try and battle a human-sized villain. And when both are giant, and fight, Ultraman delivers one of the few karate kicks scene in the show (a refreshing change from the endless rays and wrestling holds). Other than the unbelievably poor design of Da Das, this is enjoyable, serious science fiction entertainment (thankfully Ito's role is small, his broken legg keeps him in a hospital). Scenario: Masahiko Yamada, Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. ***

29. **CHALLENGE INTO SUBTERRO** (CHITEI-E NO CHOSEN) {1/29/67}
FS: Miniature set of a goldmine's exterior, near mountains.

Despite a fast-paced opening (burrowing dinosaur Goldon appears within the first 30 seconds!), this is average monster-on-the-loose type stuff. While the miniatures & explosions are okay, Goldon himself looks like a rubbery seal. There are supposedly two Goldons, but we only see one at a time (same costume, used twice). The best thing about episode 29 is a drill tank invented by Ito, so they can pursue Goldon underground and end up trapped with a fading supply of oxygen, with some insane, over-acting miner (Toho Senkichi Ohmura, a familiar face; he played a native translator in KING KONG VS. GODZILLA). Ultraman's eventual attack on Goldon is okay, but he spends more



time riding this gold-eater's back than actually fighting him. Dir.: Samaji Yanagase, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. **

30. **PHANTOM OF THE SNOW MOUNTAIN** (MABOROSHI NO YUKIYAMA) {2/12/67}
FS: Snowy mountains.

It's an intriguing addition, even if abominable snowman Oo (also spelled "Woo", though he doesn't direct films) looks as dumb as his name sounds, and much is left unanswered. Set at a ski resort (impressive miniature snow sets make Oo seem like he really is 40 meters high!), it's about some orphan girl who insists the snowy giant does no harm, and she's therefor hated by skiers. For once it's Ito who comes off as the most intelligent Science Patrol member, as he would rather they leave Oo alone. Strangely, Oo just abruptly vannishes after his spat with Ultraman, and Hayata rationalizes it like this: "It disapeared without a trace– the monster was only a legend after all." Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo, Dir.: Yuzo Higuchi, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. {31} **1/2

31. **WHO HAS COME?** (KITA NO-WA DAREDA?) {2/12/67}
FS: Captain Mura talking.

Goto (Hidao Kirino, a Toho bit-player scene in ATRAGON, DESTROY ALL MONSTERS and lots of other flicks), the Science Patrol's mysterious guest turns out to be a Keronia, one of several growing, laser-firing, alien plant people that wants to eat Japanese people! Not only is Ultraman-against-Keronia an exciting confrontation, but there are great spaceship dogfights too. Watch for a guest appearance by Shoji Nakamura of EVIL BRAIN FROM OUTERSPACE, ULTRASEVEN and RYU'SEI NINGEN ZONE. Dir.: Yuzo Higuchi, Scenario: Taro Kaido, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. {30} ***

32. **THE ENDLESS COUNTERATTACK**
FS: Science Patrol Headquarters, exterior.

Not bad for a typical monster-vs.-the military plot, featuring abundant FX like a forest fire and a jet plane spraying water on it. The obligatory reptile-on-the-loose is Zumborah, a spiney creature who's horns light up and cause temporary blindness. The subplot has some lady called Patra, supposedly from the Science Patrol's India branch, though her skin is too light; she's obviously Japanese. Cute though. Scenario: Keisuke Fujikawa, Dir.: Toshitsugu Suzuki, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. **1/2

33. **FORBIDDEN WORDS** {2/26/67}
FS: Jets in the sky.

Mefiphas's spaceship looks kinda' dumb, but otherwise it's a decent episode about another alien (Mephilas) bent on world conquest. For whatever reason, Mephilas first informs Saturo (Fuji's youngest brother) of this plan of world domination. At one point, Mephilas changes Fuji into a hypnotised giant, and also brings back a Baltan, Zarab and ULTRA Q's Kemrl Man (aka Kemura, Kemlar, etc.), though all three monsters only stand around for a few seconds. This could have been a great battle between Ultraman and all these giants! Ultraman only fights Mephilas, but it's interesting in that it's a tie; both opponents survive, so Mephilas goes back to space. Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo, Dir.: Toshitsugu Suzuki, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. **1/2

34. **A GIFT FROM THE SKY** (Sora no Okurimono) {3/5/67}
FS: Outerspace.

A lame episode, one of my least favorites. One minute, Captain Mura is abusing his authority (he demands an umbrella is delivered to him, via jet plane!), and in the

next, there's some guy jumping off a building?! Even when the bulky dinosaur Skydon (ridiculously rubber when it shakes its two front paws) appears, it's still a dumb approach: Ultraman can't defeat Skydon (who causes little or no havoc), so it's mostly about the Science Patrol using their stupid-looking weapons to destroy Skydon or send him back into space. At the end, Fuji wears a kimono and serves Hayata, Ito, Arashi & Mura tea. It's all pretty stupid. Scenario: Mamoru Sasaki, Dir.: Akio Jissoji, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano

35. **THE MONSTER GRAVEYARD** (KAIJU HAKABA) {3/12/67}
FS: Science Patrol jet in space.

Interestingly written tale of the "Monster Graveyard", where supposedly dead monsters float in space. When Ito & Arashi first discover this eerie zone, they correctly identify Antlar & Nelonga, as well as ULTRA Q's Kemlar, but they say it's "A creature Ultraman defeated last year"?! Anyway, a pretilian skeleton called Seabozu gets caught on some rocket and crashes back on Earth. I think the original TV GUIDE clipping from the 1970s summed the story up best; word for word, it said, "Ultraman helps a monster's ghost to return to its grave." Though Ultraman comes off as a bully when he coaxes Seabozu back onto a rocket, and a scene or two treat Seabozu almost like a cute "Minya"-ish monster, this is an intelligent episode. For once Hayata, Ultraman & the Science Patrol actually feel guilty about the monsters they've killed, and even hire some Shinto priests to chant at a memorial service! Scenario: Mamoru Sasaki, Dir.: Akio Jissoji, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. ***

36. **ARASHI DON'T SHOOT!** (Utsuna! Arashi) {3/19/67}
FS: Miniature cars going under a roadway.

Generally, it's just another monster-on-the-loose farce, but Zaragas (a green reptile with bullet-like holes on his back) has a 'mysterious light' that causes temporary blindness. Zaragas gets energized by raygun fire, so when Arashi fires, he gets fired. By that I mean Captain Mura dismisses the trigger-happy gunman from the Science Patrol, for nearly ten whole minutes! Eventually, Arashi is re-hired because he helps Ultraman to destroy Zaragas. Scenario: Masahiko Yamada, Dir.: Kazuho Mitsuta, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano **

37. **THE LITTLEST HERO** (CHISANA EIYUN) {3/26/67}
FS: People running down stairs.

Jesus Christ! This chapter had such potential, it could have easily been a classic, stand-out episode! Think of it, a king monster called Geronimon (named partially after Geronimo, hence the feathers!) revives 60 evil monsters to lead an all out attack on Ultraman and the Science Patrol, and cute monster Pigmon's "monster language" must be translated into English!! But the army of 60 (yeah, right) monsters turns out to be only two, they're Telesdon and Drako, but are dubbed "Gabora" and "Red King"?! As for Pigmon, he was supposedly killed off in episode #8, yet all of the sudden, for no reason at all, he's alive and well, and (get this) hanging out in a toy store?! The injoke is that he's in the monster doll section, among dolls of Red King, Girass, ULTRA Q's Kanegon, and even a wind-up toy of himself! What the hell is going on? Pigmon originally lived on the secluded Tadara Island, so just how did the Bull Mark company get their designs of him?! Besides, Pigmon dies (yet again) in this one too. Ito's feeling sorry for himself is over dramatized, and Ultraman never takes on any of the so-called "60" monsters, but at least the episode is entertaining throughout, as is Ultraman's skirmish with Geronimon & his flying, stabbing feathers. ***



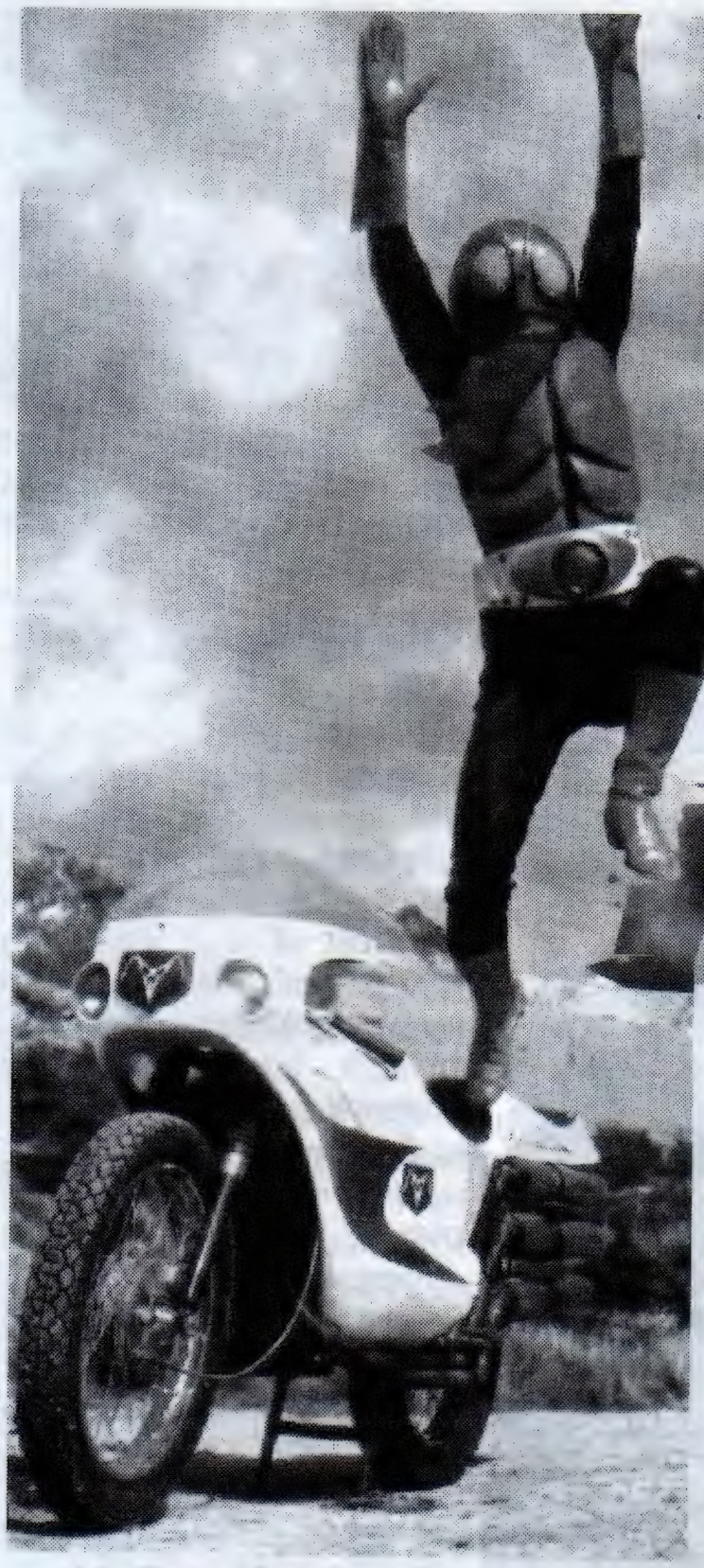
38. **SPACESHIP RESCUE COMMAND** {4/2/67}
FS: Sign that says "Uchu" in Japanese, and "Nasa" in English.

Splendid episode, dumb humor kept to a minimum and most of it is set on an alien planet! There are two monsters, Keera and Sygo, though Ultraman only battles Keera. It's standard sci-fi entertainment despite continuity flaws (i.e. The planet has a dark atmosphere for monster & miniature scenes, but the sky is blue for scenes of the Science Patrol!). The story is about an insect-like giant called Keera, who's bright eyes keep blinding nearby astronauts. Scenario: Shozo Uehara, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Special Visual FX: Teisho Arikawa. ***

39. **FAREWELL ULTRAMAN** (SARABA URUTORAMAN) {4/9/67}
FS: Space fleet from Zeton in space, coming toward Earth.

The finale is the only episode to even hint there could be other Ultramen, and Zofy only appears at the very end to rescue Ultraman, who, though being a superhero, actually suffered defeat at the hands of alien invader Zeton! Hell, it's the Science Patrol who wastes Zeton, using a tiny missile called 'Dyna-Charge'! Even so, this is a slick adventure with great miniatures & spaceship dog-fights, though suspension wires are visible whenever a flying saucer explodes. After all is done, Zofy and Ultraman fly back to Nebula M78. Scenario: Tetsuo Kinjo, Dir.: Hajime Tsuburaya, Special Visual FX: Koichi Takano. ***

KAMEN RIDER REPORT



Assuming your I.Q. is somewhat higher than that of pudding, chances are you already know the Kamen Riders are one of Japan's most prolific TV genres, the epitome of Japanese superheroism. Originally created by Shotaro Ishimori and produced by Toei Co., TV shows like KAMEN RIDER, KAMEN RIDER V3 and KAMEN RIDER BLACK are related to each other (existing in the same dimension) in much the same way as our own STAR TREK, STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION, STAR TREK: DEEP SPACE 9 and STAR TREK: VOYAGER are. As Saban Entertainment splices footage from KAMEN RIDER BLACK RX, KAMEN RIDER J and probably KAMEN RIDER ZETO to become the English language MASKED RIDER this fall, I feel that it's about time the American mainstream knows the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about Japan's most important superhero legacy since the Ultra Brothers! Hell, the Kamen Riders are the driving force behind the whole Kamen Rider genre! Without KAMEN RIDER, there would be no Kamen Riders!

So for this edition of "Kamen Rider Report", we'll get a load of all the original Kamen Rider shows & movies from the 1970s. As an added bonus (don't you just love me?!), I'm including one random episode from each series; and each individual episode reviewed includes the "first shot" for easy identification. Next issue, we'll document the Kamen Rider sagas of the 1980s, and the 1990s Kamen Rider flicks will be covered in a couple issues from right now; so start your stop-watches!

KAMEN RIDERS IN THE 1970's:

KAMEN RIDER

[Japanese for "Mask Rider"]

Produced by Toei for Broadcast on TV Asahi from 4/3/71 to 2/10/73. Consisting of 98 episodes, Creators: Shotaro Ishimori & Tohru Hiriyama, Main Writer: Masaru Igami, Main Director: Koichi Takemoto, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, Manager: Uchida Yusaku, Starring Hiroshi Fujioka as Takeshi Hongo, Takeshi Sasaki as Hayato Ichimonji, Shoji Kobayashi as Tobei Tachibana, Jiro Chiba (aka Jiro Yabuki) as Taki Kazuya, Yoko Shimada as Hiromi, and Goro Naya as Voice of Shocker, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Uchida Yusaku's action series JUDO ICHO KUSEN. TBS's ULTRAMAN. Our own GREEN HORNET. Toei's GOLDEN BAT. Starman flicks. Santo's Mexican wrestling farces. Aside from being cool & entertaining, what do these 1960s camp classics have in common? Well, they very well might have influenced KAMEN RIDER! This outstanding series could only have been inspired by a multitude of different genres, and KAMEN RIDER was one of the few Japanese TV shows which, for its time, seemed truly original. Its format was certainly a big enough hit that virtually every Japanese live action superhero series to come out later felt the need to imitate it drastically. KAMEN RIDER took Japanese audiences by storm, and things have never been the same. Toei has produced Kamen Rider episodes in anywhere from Tokyo, Japan, to just outside Tokyo, Japan!

It took two years (of discussions between producers, directors and writers) to come up with the Kamen Rider prototype & scenario. Shotaro Ishimori, Tohru Hiriyama (who had been involved in 1967's CAPTAIN ULTRA and other shows) and other creative minds at Toei came to an agreement they needed to bring back a 'boom' in Toei masked heroes, a genre absent since the mid-1960s (with Golden Bat, Space Chief, Gekko Kamen, National Kid, etc.). They accurately predicted they would bring the genre back, for a major comeback. They all agreed it was time for a new kind of hero. In 1970, the first rough draft was called MASKMAN K, and a later rejected script was MASK ANGEL, and the 3rd draft was called CROSSFIRE. The ill-fated MASKMAN K script involved



a masked hero, but he was an ordinary human with no superpowers aside from athletic skills (in his mild-mannered form, the character was to be a P.E. Teacher). Less realistic was its would be successor MASK ANGEL, where the hero did have some superhuman power (the character received thirty-thousand volts of electricity, which stimulated his muscles). The story was to deal with Hongo Takeshi (a character who would eventually be KAMEN RIDER), a fugitive framed for murder [of his teacher, Mr. Midorikawa] by the evil Ishigami. But MASK ANGEL, like its equally unsuccessful later draft CROSSFIRE, never quite gained universal acceptance at Toei. Another pre-Kamen Rider idea was tossed around at one point, was SKARLMAN, and although it never made it as a TV show, it may have succeeded as comic book at one time. The prototype they eventually settled upon, was of course, Kamen Rider; sort of a cybernetic grasshopper that rides a motorcycle. Since the series was generally meant for kids, Shotaro Ishimori had his five year old son choose from a collection of sketches & blueprints; so the kid chose the "grasshopper man", and the rest, as they say, is history! But there was still one glitch to take care of-- the tentative title at this point was "Kamen Laida; Hopa Kingu", which I believes translates as "Masked Rider, the Hopper King", because grasshoppers can jump so damn high. But the name was too long, so it was shortened.

Being a revolutionary innovator (but enough on me!), this adventure fantasy didn't exactly have a high budget. None of the monster costumes were realistic and miniatures (when used) were rarely convincing. Yet despite the over-all low key production values, the action made the program a classic of its type. What's not to like about bug-eyed motorcyclists who use motorcycle stunts, karate, acrobatics and occasional swordplay to waste dozens of monsters, cyborgs, henchmen and mad scientists from the underground empire Shocker? Sure, 10 solid minutes of characters speaking a language (Japanese) we don't understand can get dull, but it doesn't take a brain like Einstien's to follow the simple good guy vs. bad guy plots, and since we know our insect-like hero will use his acrobatic, high-flying "Rider Kick" to blow up the episodic guest monster, it's worth sitting through the dramatic, sometimes infantile character development of each episode.



This crude combination of karate, gymnastics, boxing, wrestling and occasional fencing made the fights a thrill, and the low budget FX added unintended amusement. But if there was one thing which stood out, it was title star Hiroshi Fujioka (born in Matsushita City; 1952), who would later go on to star in HIGH SEAS HIJACK (with Peter Graves), 1972's I WILL NOT FORGET, TIDAL WAVE (with Lorne Green), ESPY, America's GHOST WARRIOR, and Hong Kong's IN THE LINE OF DUTY 3. Hiroshi Fujioka sure had commitment to his role as Takeshi Hongo (Kamen Rider unmasked). Fujioka was a winner of one of Japan's many "New Faces" contests in the mid-1960s, and had minor roles in three films including THE X FROM OUTERSPACE (Shochiku; 1966), but he never generated much interest until his starring role in the TV movie GOLDEN EYE (Toei; 1969). Not only did he do some of his own motorcycle scenes in KAMEN RIDER, but sung the theme song in the first few episodes, and even wore the full costume (mask and all!) for a few of the fights! But such commitment had its tragic moments, a stunt related injury gave him a broken leg (resulting in one episode where we never actually see Kamen Rider in his human form!). With Fujioka temporarily out of commission, a new Kamen Rider had to be introduced, so enter Kamen Rider 2 (played by Takeshi Sasaki)! But Fujioka returned to the series once his leg healed, and the last few episodes were twice as exciting, as both Kamen Riders teamed up to battle Shocker's monstrous villains. This is where it gets confusing, as their costumes seemed to change (Kamen Rider's helmet color changed, and he now has stripes on his legs), making some uninformed viewers think there were four, not two Kamen Riders.

Additional cast members included a young Yoko Shimada (who would later star with Richard Chamberlain in SHOGUN) until episode #25, and of course the venerable Shoji Kobayashi, best known for his role in ULTRAMAN, as Captain Mura. ***** -DF

SHITO! KAIJIN SNOWMAN TAI NIJIN NO RIDER

{"Death Fight! Monster/Human Snowman vs. Two Riders"}



KAMEN RIDER episode #40 [Broadcast Date: 1/1/72]

First Shot: Map.

Shocker's Professor Shinigami (Eisei Amamoto of KING KONG ESCAPES, GODZILLA'S REVENGE, WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY and countless other genre favorites), in charge of Shocker's Switzerland branch unleashes Snowman (a mutant yeti with a face like a radiator) in the Swiss alps, and the beast follows vacationing Rider helpers Emi, Mika & Tobei back to Japan. Not a whole lot of thrills, but when both Kamen Riders finally team up (we rarely see both Takeshi Hongo and Hayato Ichimonji in the same shot), it becomes entertaining. Interesting to note that during the scenes set in Switzerland, we hear "Yankee Doodle Dandy" music, since Toei seems to think all non-Japanese are alike. Writer: Masaru Igami, Dir.: Minoru Yamada . ***

KAMEN RIDER VS. SHOCKER

{"Kamen Laida Tai Shoka"} A Toei Production, Running Time: 32 Min., Theatrical Debut: 3/18/72, Reviewed by DF

Often considered a "movie", but more accurately described as a 'theatrical episode', this letter-boxed, widesreen classic shows us the further adventures of Kamen Riders 1 & 2, as they continue to fight their arch-enemies of TV: Shocker! On the whole, the production values are about equal to that of the show, but this featurette blows away most of the TV episodes! KAMEN RIDER VS. SHOCKER is action packed, featuring no less than 30 villains! Lead by new monster Sanjio (who debuts here, we never saw him in the TV versions), a sort of mutant 'spit-bug', Shocker's cyborgs are after some top secret formula called GX, stored on a computer disk. ***** -DF

KAMEN RIDER VS. AMBASSADOR HELL

{"Kamen Laida Tai Jigoku Daishi"} Toei, Theatrical Debut: 7/16/72, Reviewed by DF

For whatever reason, Kamen Rider 2 doesn't appear in this sequel, unfortunately. This is another theatrical featurette, also about a half-hour long, and to make up for the lack of Kamen Rider 2, Jiro Chiba (Sonny's brother!) and Shoji Kobayashi (a regular Kamen Rider actor, and has also been in ULTRAMAN as Capt. Mura) are given bigger parts. The story depicts the atrocities of Shocker's Jigoku Taishi (Ambassador Hell), a villain who tries to gas our heroes and fire a beam at Tokyo Tower. There are plenty of fights, horse chases, motorcycle action, monsters and a climactic duel with another mutated insect, Kamirikido. ****1/2 -DF

SUPER RIDERS WITH THE DEVIL

Presented by Tong Hsing Film co, Dir.: Chorng Guan Lin, Cast: Tong Hai Wang Chien Chen Wang & Judy Reynold, Reviewed by DF

Stock footage from the previous two Japanese featurettes got edited into this Chinese dubbed, feature-length adaptation. Fortunately, the Chinese added their own trademark to this feature-length film: English subtitles! Today this movie is the only way to see any Kamen Rider action with any English translation! The story basically follows that of KAMEN RIDER VS. SHOCKER, what with the GX formula and all. But Chinese actors replace the Japanese for the non-costumed scenes, and there are even a couple costumed battles added by the Chinese kung fu crew, so we see the Kamen Riders (now called "Super Riders") fighting a sphynx-creature never seen in Japan! While the low budget film quality isn't great, this oddity has more than enough action and fun. **** -DF

KAMEN RIDER V3

Toei, TV Asahi, Consisting of 52 episodes, from 2/17/73 to 2/9/74, Creators: Shotaro Ishimori & Tohru Hiriyama, Main Dir.: Minoru Yamada, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, Starring Hiroshi Miyauchi and Akira Yamaguchi, Reviewed by DF

A week after the final episode of KAMEN RIDER came this sequel series. Though the martial arts choreography was a little more polished, and the budget was slightly higher, I don't consider this follow-up to be better than the original. However, KAMEN RIDER V3 has gone down in history as being the classic Kamen Rider program, the best in the series. With exciting tales of Destron (more monsters, an off-shoot of the previous season's Shocker army) trying to do Japan harm, and Kamen Rider V3 (Hiroshi Miyauchi, later of GO RANGERS, JACKERS, KAI KETSU ZUBAT, WAR IN SPACE, and WINSPECTOR) continually beating the crap out of them, this outstanding series could be used as the dictionary definition of fun. Also on hand for a few episodes is the late actor Akira Yamaguchi (PHANTOM AGENTS and DENJIN ZABOGA), who plays our main hero's occasional sidekick (pun intended), Riderman.

Though a spectacular program in its own right, there can only be one truly original Kamen Rider series. As mentioned before, after KAMEN RIDER, every series was basically KAMEN RIDER under a new name. So naturally, to retain fans of the original program, this sequel series follows the first KAMEN RIDER more than closely, as do the later TV shows.

There's been some confusion as to the name of the obligatory villains. Pronounced in Japanese as 'Destron', some American fans suspect it's just their attempt at pronouncing 'Death-Tron', but we may never know the answer. ***** -DF

DESTRON SHIKOKU SAKUSEN

{"Destron Invades Shikoku"}

KAMEN RIDER V3 #20

F.S.: Henchman at night by the water, shining a flashlight.

Guillotine-Zaurus, Destron's latest reptilian cyborg wrecks havoc on a ship, planning to invade Shikoku Island while searching for ex-Destron scientist Professor Serizawa, who defected. Kamen Rider V3's climactic battle with the henchmen is terrific, but he ends up captured when the villains show him their hostages. So it ends on a cliffhanger. Writer: Masaru Igami, Dir.: Minoru Yamada. ***1/2 -DF

KAMEN RIDER V3 VS. DESTRON

Toei, Running Time: 32 Min., Theatrical Debut: 7/18/73, Reviewed by DF

This theatrical featurette proves them Kamen Rider productions just keep getting better and better! More well made & polished, the fights are starting to look convincing and there are explosions scattered throughout. Hiroshi Miyauchi reprises the role TV made famous: Shin Kasami (alias Kamen Rider V3)! He's attacking Destron's new island base to destroy a deadly jewel them villains have converted into a deadlier weapon. The climactic battle in Kyoto has V3 not only aided by trusty right hand man Riderman, but the two original Kamen Riders 1 & 2! Our heroic foursome tangles with many a monster, including main baddie Dr. G and episodic guest villain Taiho Buffalo! ***** -DF

FRANKENSTEIN'S KUNG FU MONSTER

Atlas Film & TV Production; 1973, in

association with Ton Hsing Films (China) and Toei Co. (Japan), Dir.: Chorng Guan Lin, Featuring: Tong Hai Wang, Reviewed by DF

Okay, imagine SUPER RIDERS WITH THE DEVIL (reviewed previously), but taken one step further. Not only is FRANKENSTEIN'S KUNG FU MONSTER another Hong Kong or Taiwan re-edit of Japanese footage, but it's dubbed in German! Though released in Germany (and I've heard rumors there's also an English dubbing of FRANKENSTEIN'S KUNG FU MONSTER, which I very much doubt), I believe its Chinese title was originally SUPER RIDER V3 WITH THE DEVIL, since it's a direct sequel to SUPER RIDERS WITH THE DEVIL. But whether you're watching Kamen Rider V3 in Japanese, Chinese or German, it's still tons of fun! Though Hiroshi Miyauchi has been edited out of the role he made famous, the Chinese double who replaces him tries his best, adding his own kung fu flair. Again, it's deceitful editing, but that never stopped POWER RANGERS.

Most of the fights are taken from the featurette KAMEN RIDER V3 VS. DESTRON, as Kamen Rider V3 teams up with both Riderman and the first two Kamen Riders to wipe out what the Japanese called the Shocker Empire, what the Chinese called the Devil Empire, and now known in Germany as the Frankenstein Empire (but don't expect any relation whatsoever to Mary Shelley's classic novel!). But the Chinese added a few of their own action scenes (including that villainous Sphinx from SUPER RIDERS WITH THE DEVIL), and although the whole thing is dubbed in German, the battles are still great fun visually. ****

KAMEN RIDER X

Produced by Toei for TV Asahi, Broadcast from 2/16/74 to 10/12/74, Consisting of 35 episodes, Creators: Shotaro Ishimori & Tohru Hiriyama, Main Writer: Masaru Igami, Main Dir.: Katsuhiko Taguchi, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, Reviewed by DF

Though not necessarily a hit like the first two programs, I don't see KAMEN RIDER X as vastly inferior. About the same amount of action as the other two, but with slightly improved, and more colorful FX and props. Unfortunately, this is where some of the more ridiculous monsters (i.e. an apache/crustacean called Sanri Geronimo Jr. in the final episode!) appear, as camp and unintended humor is on the rise. But still, Kamen Rider X has a cool, silver costume, and neither the program's ending or opening theme songs get annoying (where as KAMEN RIDER V3's ending song had irritating, high-pitched kiddies plaguing the chorus). Speaking of kids, it seems that perhaps KAMEN RIDER X had less annoying tots than did V3, though I could be wrong (I've yet to see complete episode runs of either show). From what I've seen, KAMEN RIDER X is of average entertainment level, has interesting scripts and characters, and I fail to see why poor ratings ended its run after a mere 35 episodes.

Tobei Tachibana (still played by the ever energetic Shoji Kobayashi) yet again returns in probably every episode, to continue his support of the Kamen Riders (in this case, X Rider, who's a rival of G.O.D., which stands for "Government of Darkness"). Ryu Hayama plays Keisuke Jin (Rider X's secret identity), but fans may also recognize Hayama for his role as the young coordinator of Expo '70 in GAMERA VS. MONSTER X. He's got basically the same charisma as Hiroshi Fujioka and Hiroshi Miyauchi, and as for his fighting ability, he's got more form than speed. The episodes I've seen would indicate that most of the fights could be longer, but one of the better episodes is #33, as it features a team up; Kamen Riders 2 & V3 make appearances. ****

TAIKETSU! KINGU DAKU TAI X LAIDA
{"Showdown! King Dark vs. X Rider"}
KAMEN RIDER X #32
FS: Lady walking.

Not an absolutely thrilling episode, but well written. In one scene, King Dark's henchmen raid an African dance troupe's stage performance, so one of the tribe's warriors beats up a henchman or two. The story deals with Arikapone, an ant who wears a top hat and is in pursuit of some secret plans. Writer: Masaru Igami, Dir.: Tohru Setsuda. **1/2

THE FIVE RIDERS VS. KING DARK

{aka "The Kamen Rider X Movie", unofficially} Released 7/25/74, Running Time: 29 min., Reviewed by DF

Another fun theatrical episode, but with Kamen Rider X taking the spotlight. The other Kamen Riders (1, 2, V3 & Riderman) also aid our main hero at the climax, but we never really see much of them in their human forms (just stock footage for quick-change scenes). It's pretty damn fun, as King Dark resurrects a whole army of monsters from the KAMEN RIDER X program, plus a new villain called Franken Coumori (Coumori means bat), and the only person who's aware of this is a young witness called Masaru. But no adults believe him that monsters are on the loose, so Kamen Rider X and his brothers all unite to save Japan again. Their combining predates the Sentai programs, so this influential team-up may be the official birth of anything from GORANGERS, to DYNAMAN, to POWER RANGERS. I honestly believe this movie to be the first hint of the Sentai legacy. ***

THE INVINCIBLE SPACE STREAKER

Dir:. Albert Yue, Reviewed by Damon Foster

From Hong Kong or Taiwan comes this pathetic, low budget ripoff of KAMEN RIDER X! Hell, there's even a painting of Kamen Rider X on one of its movie posters, but the hero (simply referred to as "Superman" in the English subtitles) in this movie is just a generic Kamen Rider-wannabe in general, not looking especially like Kamen Rider X, so unlike the hero on the poster. No matter how cheap I told you KAMEN RIDER or KAMEN RIDER V3 seemed, this low key Chinese movie is infinitely worse. What's really sad is, it had the potential to be just as good as its Japanese inspirations. The sets are okay, there are a few explosions, and the actor in this white Kamen Rider wannabe costume is capable of decent martial arts. So just why the hell did those lame ripper offers not photograph or choreograph the fights properly! Horrid photography, cinematography and editing makes it look like some bad American martial arts movie!

This embarrassing, bewilderingly childish, feature length movie only features about eight minutes of action, and has something to do with an aggravating kid called Hsiao Po. Mad scientists, who also invent stupid-looking henchmen and rubber monsters, turn the kid into a white uniformed Kamen Rider-clone called either Invincible Space Streaker or Superman, who sets about fighting (briefly) the villains. 1/2 -DF

KAMEN RIDER AMAZON

Toei, Broadcast on TV Asahi, 24 episodes from 10/19/74 to 3/29/75, Creators: Shotaro Ishimori & Tohru Hiriyama, Main Writer: Masaru Igami, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, Starring Tohru Okazaki & Shoji Kobayashi, Reviewed by DF

After the poor ratings for KAMEN RIDER AMAZON, it was decided that a change-of-pace was what the Kamen Rider genre needed, so along came this offbeat oddity that breaks all the rules of Japanese superhero TV. This is both a blessing and a curse; it's a blurse. KAMEN RIDER AMAZON is not my alltime favorite, but every episode I've seen has been worthwhile, I can't actually say I was disappointed. However, TV audiences in Japan were, as this one failed even compared to KAMEN RIDER X! My only real problem with KAMEN RIDER AMAZON is that there really weren't enough henchmen for Amazon to battle. There were these weird henchwomen (who always seem to be yelling "Cute" when they see Amazon!), but even with obviously male stunt doubles, the epic battles established in the first three programs (where a solitary hero defeats several baddies simultaneously) just aren't present.

However, KAMEN RIDER AMAZON almost makes up for this lack of one-against-many action because of its abnormal, sometimes unpredictable approach. To begin with, the villainous monsters of Gedon, unlike those of Shocker or Destron, don't seem to be mechanical. These Gedon villains rarely explode, they bleed! Limbs are sometimes torn off, and Kamen Rider Amazon is one of those rarest of heroes, one who bites and can gouge with his claws! Amazon is the most barbaric of the Kamen Riders, so this over-the-top program is the goriest live action, Japanese superhero series I've ever seen! Something like this could never be shown on American TV, children's or otherwise! Since the action isn't like that in the previous three programs, the frequent bloodshed is the highlight. Contradicting that is KAMEN RIDER AMAZON's being one of the more childish Kamen Rider programs so far. It actually features a little boy called Masahiko as a regular character. But either my old age (and newfound, accidental fatherhood) is changing my attitude, or maybe Masahiko and the other kiddies in AMAZON aren't as irritating as those in other shows. I don't know. Perhaps they're as annoying as always, but since we know there's also going to be a little bloodletting in the episode, it's still cool.

The unique thing about KAMEN RIDER AMAZON, as you're about to read, is that our hero Daisuke is rather like a caveman. It's really not until the 11th episode that the righteous wildman gets any real grasp of Japanese language; before that, he's just content to make funny noises with his hands and say "Gedon" a lot. In this way, the first few episodes are pretty understandable even to non-Japanese speakers, since our hero doesn't understand the language either!

The barbaric Kamen Rider Amazon was just a little Japanese baby called Daisuke Yamamoto (Tohru Okazaki) when his plane crashed (the pilot & his parents all died) in the Amazon Jungle. Raised there by some sort of witch doctor, he's given magic powers to become the first organically correct (the others are the results of laboratories, chemicals, computers, etc.) Kamen Rider, called Amazon. When adult, he relocates to Japan, but has trouble identifying with civilized society, and he's kind of primitive. But a bizarre army of monsters (who drink human blood to replenish their en-



ergy) wants a magical bracelet he wears, since when combined with their own, can create super powers. The course of the series has Daisuke Yamamoto/Kamen Rider Amazon, Masahiko, and longtime Kamen Rider pal Tobei Tachibana protecting Japan and themselves from Gedon's (lead by Gorugos and Dr. Zero) oddball menagerie of creatures. ***1/2

JISOKO KARAKITA HENA YATSU!!
{"Stranger Arises from Beneath the Earth"}
KAMEN RIDER AMAZON #5
F.S.: Tree branches.

Kamen Rider Amazon takes a stand against illegal poaching, but the police are baffled by his uncivilized behavior and falsely accuse him of murder so they arrest him. The confused primitive escapes (with help from Tobei Tachibana) in time to tackle Mogura Kaijin, Gedon's mole monster, who turns Daisuke into a bloody mess! Regardless, our Japanese Tarzan still wins the fight, yet allows the subterranean, mutant rodent to escape. The character would become a regular character, and Amazon's friend until his death in episode 20. Writer: Amasaaki Suzuki, Dir.: Itsaku Uchida. **1/2

KAMEN RIDER STRONGER

A Toei Production, Broadcast on the Tokyo Broadcasting Service from 4/5/75 to 12/27/75, Consisting of 39 episodes, Producers: Shotaro Ishimori & Tohru Hiriyama, Main Writer: Masaru Igami, Main Dir.: Daisuke Yamazaki, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, Starring Shigeru Araki, Reviewed by DF

It would appear that after the failure of KAMEN RIDER AMAZON, TV Asahi wouldn't touch the Kamen Riders for the remainder of the 1970s. So I guess the rival network, TBS gave it a shot, seeing as their ULTRAMAN LEO (the last of the Ultra Brothers, for a while, anyway) had gone off the air about a month before. But despite the change of a network, the series still came from Toei and all those who worked on the earlier programs, so any changes were slight. Like Amazon, the design of the new Kamen Rider differed drastically from the original riders, but that didn't necessarily make the series worse. I did however, come to the conclusion that a few of the fights are a little slower now, since Kamen Rider Stronger's costume appears to be bulkier and more cumbersome than the previous riders' outfits.

I had really hoped to give either KAMEN RIDER AMAZON or this one a negative review. I mean, not every series can be a classic, right? There's got to be that inevitable downfall which happens to all long running programs. But I've watched some of the earlier episodes of KAMEN RIDER STRONGER, and honestly can't say I was disappointed! Though the villainous hencmen could do without the silly Mickey Mouse-like ears, on the whole, this is another great show. Like I've mentioned time and time again, technology and FX improve, so this program has decent production values, more so than previous programs.

Shigeru Araki plays Shigeru Shiyou, a tough, feisty motorcyclist who tricked them demons & cyborgs of Black Satan into turning him into Kamen Rider Stronger (the idiotic villains had hoped he'd use his super powers to assist their nefarious deeds. Some bad guys never learn!), and he therefor becomes their arch-enemy. Another supporting hero is called Tackle (Yuriko Misaki), the only female Kamen Rider. Personally, I think her lady bug-like costume looks stupid, but at least this show has two heroes; that is, until episode #30 where she got killed off. Black Satan, lead by a cyclops called Mr. Titan, impersonates humans by letting these little, crab-like crustaceans crawl in the victims' ears (a convincing and chilling effect!), and that person becomes possessed. The only catch is that those people end up 'marked' with ear-ring like marks on their ear lobes, so they're recognizable as enemy agents. Fortunately for us humans (and Japanese humans in particular), heroic Kamen Rider Stronger has a few tricks up his sleeves as well. Like all Kamen Riders, he's got a fancy motorcycle, martial arts and acrobatics capabilities, but he also has these electric hands which remain silver even in his human form, so he has to wear gloves! ***1/2

ORE WA DENKI NINGEN STRONGER!!
{"I am the Electric Human-- Stronger!!"}
KAMEN RIDER STRONGER #1
FS: Boat.

Black Satan's henchmen plan their first attack; hijacking a small hovercraft at Irako Shore. But even though this is the pilot episode, our heroes already have their powers (their origin will be explained in episode #2, as a flashback)! So the action starts off early, as Kamen Rider Stronger and Tackle deal with Kitsu Kaijin Gangaru, a robot who shoots out poison gas and looks like a tea-kettle made out of slinkies. Writer: Masaru Igami, Dir.: Masaki Tsukada. ***

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 48)



SUPERHEROES BROKEN DOWN BY NATIONALITY

CHINESE

INFRAMAN

An early example of a Chinese cinematic do-gooder was in the equally Chinese stageplay MAN FROM SHENSI, originally written by Runjy Shaw (the oldest Shaw Brother) as a play, but later adapted to be a silent, B&W film in 1924. It was performed in the family's Shanghai theater and was the changing point for the Shaw family, as their vaudeville acts had become about as successful as O.J. Simpson being hired for Ginsu commercials. Whether the Robinhood-like MAN FROM SHENSI is truly a superhero movie by today's standards is debatable, but it seemed to get the ball rolling, as far as Chinese adventure/dramas.

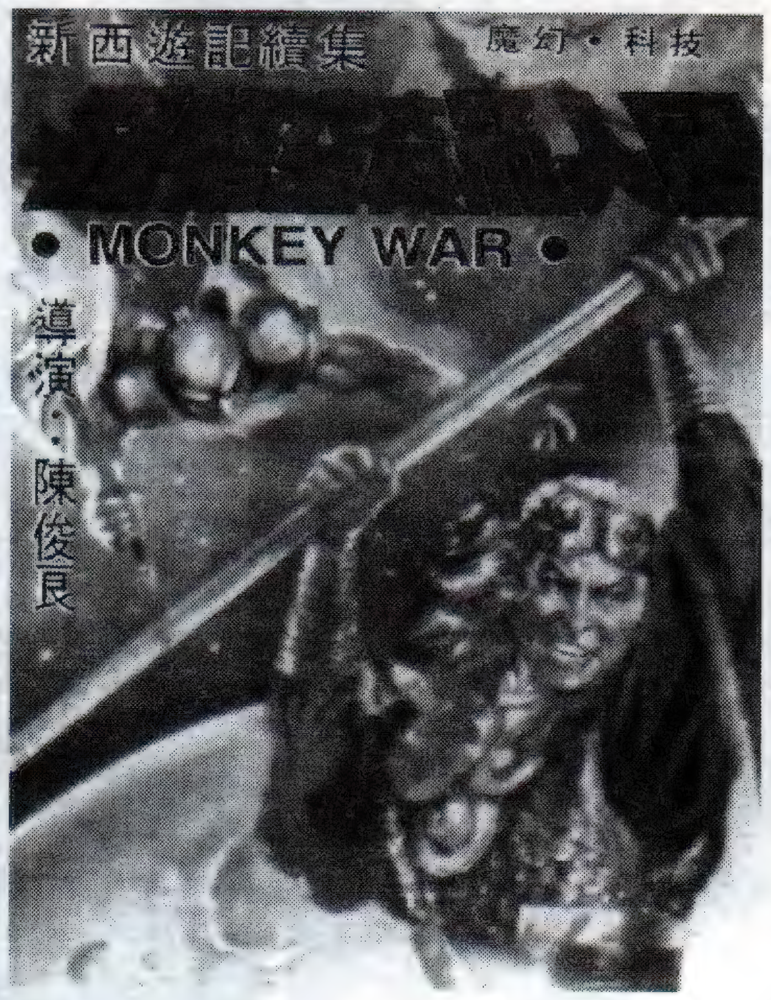
Later came 1926's MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD. Based on Wu Cheng En's classic novel ("Journey to the West") from the 13th century, the B&W, silent drama told of the magical Monkey King, undoubtedly the world's first superhero (though nobody called it that, at the time). Though I've never seen MAN FROM SHENSI or MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD, most likely they're the usual Peking opera-type stuff; dancing, singing, highly artificial over acting, and some acrobatics. Fortunately, there would be hundreds of Monkey King movies and TV shows to come out later on, once people knew how to do special effects. Enjoyable examples of the Monkey King genre include THE MONKEY (Shaw Bros.: 1967), NEW PILGRIMS TO THE WEST (Seasonal Films; 1978), MONKEY WAR (Lo Wei Films; 1984), Vietnam's crappy TAY DU KI, and Japanese efforts like ALAKAZAM THE GREAT (Toei; 1961) and SAIYUKI (NTV; 1979) which got dubbed in English simply as MONKEY. But getting back to older period flicks like MONKEY FIGHTS GOLDEN LEOPARD and MAN FROM SHENSI, the question arises: Are we straying a little too far from this magazine's subject matter? There's really no fine line between adventurer and superhero. While I'm entirely unfamiliar with the "Man from Shensi" character, I feel I can safely call the Monkey King (also known as Sun Wu Kung in China, San Goku in Japan, and Alakazam the Great in the U.S.) a superhero; he flies, has unlimited magic powers, martial arts & swordplay capability, and can alter his size and shape.

In the years that followed, China never seemed interested in entering the contemporary world modern sci-fi type films. So if they made superhero movies in the 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, or 1960s, nothing was considered worth preserving. Their type of superhero (if you can call it that) were the swordwielding folk heroes, kung fu master Wong Fei Hung, the Monkey King, and countless characters in swordplay martial arts epics (often directed by the great Chang Cheh) in the 1960s. They also had a few spy capers. However, the late 1960s introduced THE GREEN HORNET to Hong Kong TV, were it was a hit. Knowing how imitative the Chinese are (they've had numerous James Bond ripoffs, Zato Ichi ripoffs, and later even Bruce Lee ripoffs), it seems logical that they'd have made GREEN HORNET imitators, given its success, right?! This is pure speculation on my part, but doesn't it seem likely that HK may have their own "Black Hornet", "Red Hornet" or "Mandarin Orange Hornet"? After all, they made a movie actually called JAMES BOND- CHINESE STYLE, so anything is possible.

Within the kung fu movie boom of the 1970s, producers, releasers and other money-grubbers began milking every martial arts subgenre to the last drop. Seeping through the cracks of chop sockey are a few Chinese/Japanese hybrids involving superheroes. Unfortunately, while Chinese & Thai moviemakers had a knack for making amusing kung fu farces (of-



First he appeared in novels, then in operas, the Monkey King Asia's oldest superhero!







Shih Szu and Lo Lieh in THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE ORIENT (1974).

ten on a budget equivalent to a Mcdonalds cook's weekly paycheck!), most of their sci-fi heroes sucked like an industrial strength vacuum cleaner and are unintended comedies at best. 1971's Japanese KAMEN RIDER got edited into the cheap (yet fun) co-production SUPER RIDERS WITH THE DEVIL, and another Chinese-Japanese co-production involving the Kamen Riders got dubbed in German as FRANKENSTEIN'S KUNG FU MONSTER. Watching either of these hybrids is a schizophrenic experience, with footage of Chinese actors spliced in and around all the shots of Japanese, costumed heroes (and history repeats itself! Later, Japanese Kamen Rider material will similarly debut in America as Saban's Masked Rider). It's also believed that the Kamen Riders appeared in a third Thai movie where they teamed up with Hindu folk hero Hanuman (an offshoot of the Monkey King). Speaking of Hanuman, the dancing ape would also meet Ultraman and his brothers in ULTRA BROTHERS VS. THE SIX MONSTER ARMY (Chinese title: "High Flying Super Men"), easily the most ridiculous of the Chinese/Japanese mishmashes. Hanuman wasn't the only old ancient Thailand savior to meet his contemporary Japanese counterparts. A stone god known simply as 'Giant' starred in two watchable movies from Bangkok, and in one of them, teamed up with Japan's own JUMBORG ACE. This odd flick made it to Italy as GLI UOMINI DI MARTE MARSMEN. Regardless, a pattern was starting; Chinese couldn't make superhero movies by themselves, and often relied on help from Japan or Italy.

When the Chinese weren't getting superhero pointers from Japan, they looked to Italy for inspiration, and Italy's classic "Three Fantastic Supermen" film series was only too happy to provide it. The first co-production was called CRASH! CHE BOTTE - STRIPPO STRAPPO STROPPIO (aka "Los Supermens Contra Oriente"), but was known to us as THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE ORIENT. While the heroes resembled typical comic book attire (capes, bodysuits, boots, etc.), their fights were distinctly Asian, that unbeatable combination of martial arts and acrobatics normally associated with kung fu films. In fact, Chinese kung fu stars Lo Lieh and Shih Szu became superheroes themselves, to help Italy's Three Fantastic Supermen defeat a gang of mobsters. The formula of teaming up Italian and Chinese action stars seemed fun enough to make 1974's AMAZONS AND SUPERMEN (aka SUPER STOOGES AND THE WONDER WOMEN!). This was a campy, generally embarrassing hybrid set in gladiator times, which teamed up one of the original Three Fantastic Supermen, Nick Jordan, with former Monkey King portrayer Yueh Hua, also in such films as COME DRINK WITH ME, SEVEN BLOWS OF THE DRAGON, and later IN THE LINE OF DUTY III. If there were other superhero movies produced by China & Italy, they're harder to find than a Fred Rogers porno movie.

The exceptional Chinese superhero of all-time was of course, INFRAMAN (Shaw Bros.; 1976), a movie more fun than a barrel of drunken monkeys! An action packed, FX filled, colorful epic which was a blatant salute to ULTRAMAN, INAZUMAN and other Japanese superheroes which it imitated mercilessly. INFRAMAN helped make stars out of two of its young actors: Bruce Le and Danny Lee. It instantly became a cult hit in America, but never made enough money to generate sequels or imitations. But classic or not, INFRAMAN too borrows stock footage (destruction scenes) from Japanese movies, and music (i.e. a tune or two from



Terry Liu as Princess Dragon Mom, IFRAMAN's mortal enemy.



ROBOTRIX's stunning starlet AMY YIP!

Japan's MIRRORMAN) from Japanese TV. But compared to other HK flicks, INFRAMAN remains a one-of-a-kind masterpiece, it's a shame there aren't more movies like this! One attempt was INVINCIBLE SPACE STREAKER, but produced by an independent company (not Shaw Brothers or Golden Harvest), it came off as a low budget, pathetic, unbelievably childish ripoff of KAMEN RIDER X. This is a shame, since the movie (available in an English subtitled print) had decent fights, and is one of the few Chinese superhero movies which didn't rely on imported Japanese footage.

At least five years before our own Saban changed Japanese characters into POWER RANGERS, some Chinese TV company created their equivalent, TAI KONG TSAN SU ("Outerspace Warriors"), a mid-1980s ripoff of Japan's SUN VULCAN (Toei; 1981) and DYNAMAN (Toei; 1983). While boasting some impressive opening credits (plenty of cool stunts, fights, FX & acrobatics), the shot on video format combined with each episode being a full hour long, made this long forgotten series a complete bore. The action was actually quite scarce, and what few episodes I've seen are unbelievably talky. It's incredibly cheap too, with villains wearing aluminum foil, stolen music off Billy Idol's "White Wedding" song, and the heroic trio's spaceship being a storebought STAR WARS toy! If independently Chinese superheroes are as lame as this, they may wish to consider going back to relying on Japanese assistance from now on. TAI KONG TSAN SU is about as fun as a lecture on Crop Rotation delivered by Ed Asner.

Fortunately, it's easy to get most 1980s HK films on tape nowadays, thanks to an abundance of mail-order companies and Chinese videostores in America, and the fact that so damn many pretentious, trendy mainstream movie mags are cashing in on the HK craze, all trying to 'introduce' (hah!) these films to America (again). But among the many action, comedy, horror, fantasy, kung fu, drama and exploitation films there are two genres which still seem to be conspicuously missing from the Chinese movie industry: Science fiction and superheroes! Old, purely Chinese, mythical heroes like the Monkey King can be found on video in such films as THE MONKEY (aka MONKEY GOES TO THE WEST), NEW TILGRIMS TO THE WEST and of course, MONKEY WAR, which are worth seeking out, as is another variation on the Monkey King legend-- the 1992 live action DRAGON BALL- THE MAGIC BEGINS (aka "Seven Dragon Pearls") based on the Japanese (of course!) cartoon DRAGON BALL Z. DRAGON BALL- THE ADVENTURE BEGINS is actually one of several over-the-top action fantasies usually shot in Taiwan. Though they're not all necessarily superhero movies, these wacky kiddie films offer the same kind of fun, examples being MAGIC OF SPELL, CHILD OF PEACH, MAGICAL WARRIORS, HELLO! DRACULAR, RAI RAI KYONSHIZU, KUNG FU WONDER CHILD and HAI TZU WONG.

An enjoyable example of HK adult superhero cinema is the erotic, violent 1991 caper ROBOTRIX (starring David Wu and voluptuous beauties Amy Yip and Chikako Aoyama), but it too is a Japanese co-production, naturally (known in Japan as BUSTROID, appropriately!). So even today, it seems the best Chinese heroes are those which owe something to Japan, a classic example being Tsui Hark's 1988 stinker ROBOT FORCE (aka I LOVE MARIA), which I thought stunk despite its decent budget and production values. Rarely would a Chinese company make a sci-fi hero movie by themselves, and this chaotically written fiasco proves why.

Even worse than ROBOT FORCE (which at least had nice costumes and that



Steven Chow Sing Chi demonstrates his love for Ultraman, in the satire LOVE ON DELIVERY.

cutie Sally Yeh)) is ROBO VAMPIRE (aka ROBO HUNTER), a bewilderingly cheap ripoff of ROBOCOP which has our heroic Robo Hunter shooting Chinese vampires, one of which wears a gorilla mask (not meant to be a gorilla mask!). But ROBO VAMPIRE is one of the most hilarious unintentional comedies I've ever seen, making PLAN NINE FROM OUTERSPACE seem like a beautifully written, epic masterpiece & blockbuster. Equally ridiculous (though highly entertaining) is DEVIL'S DYNAMITE (available in local videostores, dubbed in English!), involving a streamlined superhero (a cross between Silver Surfer and Rocketeer) who uses kung fu, acrobatics, and Michael Jackson-inspired 'moonwalking' to wipe out vampires, mobsters and maybe an occasional ninja. You just gotta' see this one to believe it; they crammed in several characters and an



Maggie Cheung of HEROIC TIOR & HEROIC TRIO II

adult, romantic subplot (DEVIL'S DYNAMITE is most likely two films edited together).

So what lies ahead for Chinese superheroes? Well, Steven Chiau Sing Chi (HK's #1 box office draw and matinee idol) played the infamous Monkey King in a series of movies, and was in an amusing salute to Ultraman in the hilarious comedy LOVE ON DELIVERY (1994). So obviously, Ultraman is still big in China. After the dismal efforts by Tsuburaya to produce new Ultraman programs [which blew chunks big time] in both Australia and the U.S.A., the next Ultraman series was to be shot somewhere in China, to add a distinctly Chinese flare to the international Ultra legacy, but the project was cancelled!! In the meantime, HK still occasionally attempts to make movies depicting their own weird superhero concepts, two of the more tolerable being HEROIC TRIO (1992) and FUTURE COPS (1993). Not excellent or even great, but worth checking out for the sheer lunacy and imagination.



Maggie Cheung

SUPERHEROES AMERICAN

During the 1930s & 1940s, superheroes of radio and comics got adapted to B&W movies & serials. Examples include , VIGILANTE, ZORO'S FIGHTING LEGION, 1937's ZORO RIDES AGAIN, 1938's THE LONE RANGER, 1939's THE FIGHTING DEVIL DOGS, 1939's MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN (12 chapters) 1939's THE SPIDER'S WEB, 1939's THE FLYING G-MEN (featuring a hero called the Black Falcon), 1942's CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT, 1942's SPY SMASHER (12 chapters), 1943's THE PHANTOM (15 chapters), THE SHADOW, 1943's THE MASKED MARVEL, 1943's CAPTAIN AMERICA, 1949's BATMAN AND ROBIN, and 1952's BLACKHAWK. But this period also saw the cinematic debut of the one and only Superman. Max Fleischer's SUPERMAN cartoon shorts came out in 1941, and Superman returned in 1948, this time in live action form and was played by Kirk Alyn (who returned to play the Man of Steel in 1950's SUPERMAN VS. ATOM MAN). But the most wellknown of the old superhero serials was 1943's BATMAN.

The BATMAN (1943) serial was released as a two-volume tape set in 1991 by Good Times Home Video. But as mentioned last issue, this original serial had a lot of anti-Japanese, racist propaganda, and it all comes off as pretty damn funny today. It was produced by Columbia Pictures during WWII, but nowadays, Columbia is owned by Japan's Sony Corp! You think maybe that's why the original narrator, who referred to Japanese-Americans in Concentration Camps as "shifty-eyed Japs" who had been gathered up by



Captain Marvel tackles the baddies.



a "wise government", has now been abruptly dubbed to say the government is rounding up "immoral hoods"?! The main villain was played by J. Carrol Naish. Unconvincing eye makeup and a bad accent turned him into "Daka, a sinister Jap spy", but in the politically correct 1990s, he's now just a "vile, foreign spy"! I think Dan Scapperotti summed it up best in CINEFANTASTIQUE's February 1991 edition. In response to the toning down of the 1943 BATMAN, Mr. Scapperotti hilariously wrote: "No doubt we can expect to see David Lean's BRIDGE ON THE RIVER KWAI reissued as the story of a joyous Anglo-Japanese cooperative construction job interrupted by imperialistic American terrorists."

After World War II ended in the mid-'40s, news began spreading that the U.S. Air Force was making experimental jetpacks which could enable people to fly 'like a bird'. Real jet packs were cumbersome apparatus, and were virtually abandoned in real life, yet their influence was important in fictional hero stories (and would later appear in anything from THUNDERBALL, to LOST IN SPACE, to GILLIGAN'S ISLAND). Superheroes flying using futuristic jetpacks were common in comic books & pulp since the 1930s, but their first appearance on film wasn't until 1949's KING OF THE ROCKET MEN. Though long forgotten by most hero fans, Rocketman (the original inspiration for 1991's ROCKETEER) may be a major influence for superheroes, American or otherwise (Rocketman's metallic helmet bears a resemblance to Japanese heroes who'd later appear in the 1960s and 1970s, etc.). He had a high-tech look, and could fly.

The B&W serial KING OF THE ROCKETMEN was made after the golden age of the theatrical, weekly serials had been made obsolete by the existence of TV. Yet it was popular enough to come up with a sequel, the serial RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON, which came out in 1951, as did Columbia's CAPTAIN VIDEO. Interesting to note that a villain in RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON was played by Clayton Moore, a few years before he became THE LONE RANGER.

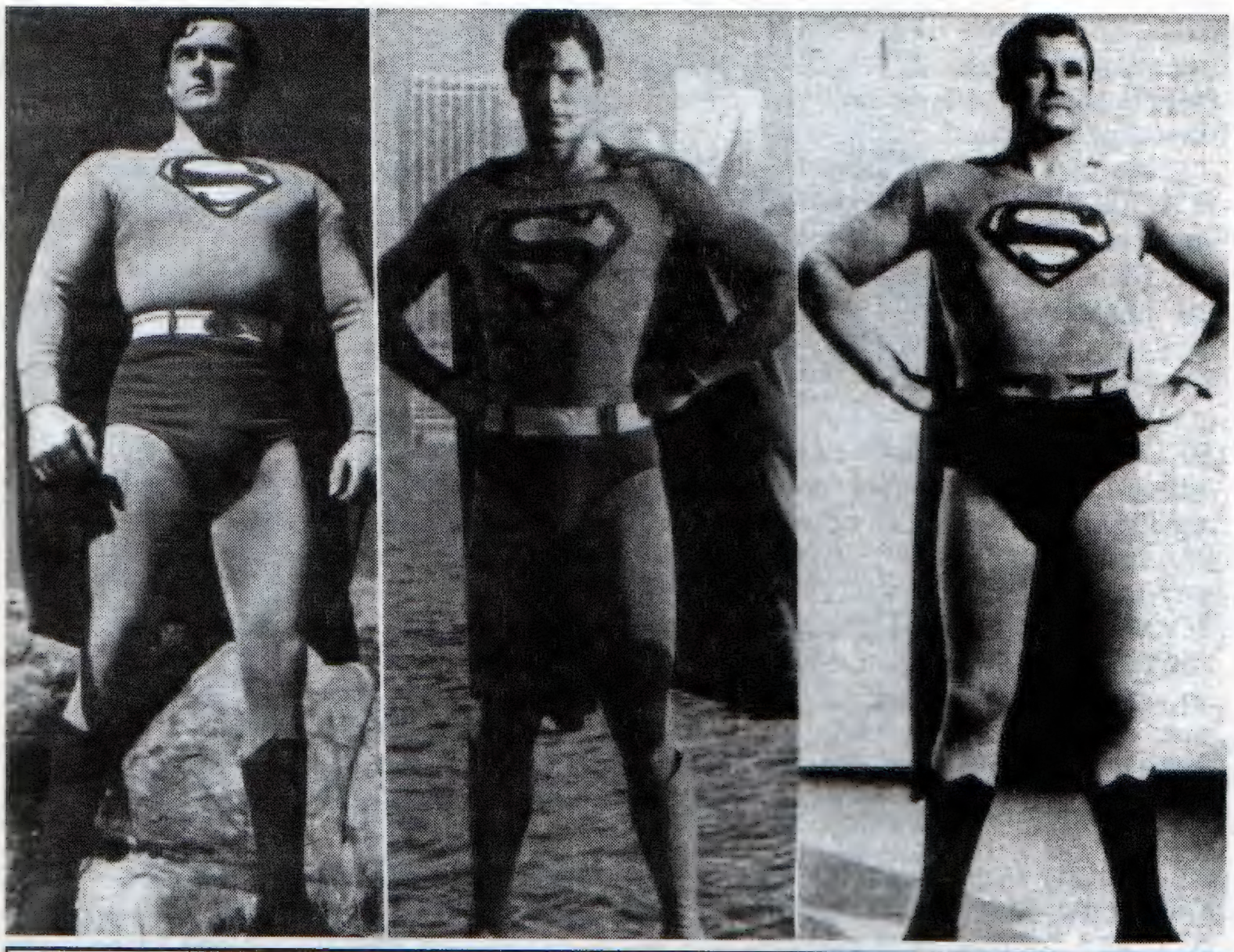
But the chrome-helmeted Rocketman returned to fight crime yet again in ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE (1952). In it, a very young, pre-Spock Leonard Nimoy played a swimming alien called Narab. But by this time, the old gimmick (theatrical cliff-hangers) finally failed at the box office, and ZOMBIES OF THE STRATOSPHERE nearly bombed. Okay, so TV was kicking butt, and theatrical showings were sucking it. So it was a case of, 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em'. The last gasp for Rocketman was in the 1953 TV series COMMANDO CODY (Rocketman's alias), which lasted for twelve 30-minute episodes. Strangely, though it was made for TV, I believe this show was the only part of the Rocketman genre not yet released on home video.

That electric upstart, TV became the main form of American superheroism in the 1950s. Most superheroes now came from outerspace, like the title hero of the 104-episode series THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN (where the men of Planet Krypton wore obvious Flash Gordon-hand-me-downs), which aired from 1953 to 1957, and still survives in repeats today. George Reeves now played the man of steel, and was the first time audiences viewed him both in live action and in color (only the first two seasons were B&W). THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN was incredibly tame, Superman rarely socked the criminals, instead often letting them run into walls and each other, basically knocking themselves out. Superman's flying FX were fairly convincing, but the remainder was dull-- lighthearted, under acted, and with non-ambitious scripts & a lackluster atmosphere. Despite the program's generally non-violent nature, the question of superheroes corrupting our children (still present today, i.e. the whole POWER RANGERS controversy) made its debut during the broadcast of THE ADVENTURES OF SUPERMAN. Though George Reeves was a generally non-aggressive character, he did jump out of windows (from skyscrapers) a lot, causing at least one young viewer to plunge to his death. Speaking of real-life death, George Reeves proved he wasn't really faster than a speeding bullet after all! He blew his brains out apparently depressed that he'd been typecast as Superman, and couldn't get any new acting jobs. George Reeves's (still dead after all these years!) death was tragic, as was the time he played Superman in a stupid episode of the equally stupid I LOVE LUCY show, no wonder he took a gun to his head.

Additional B&W superhero TV shows appeared in the 1950s, such as a live BUCK ROGERS (ABC; 1950), CAPTAIN ZERO (syndicated; 1955), FLASH GORDON



The modern day ROKETEER with the original ROKET MEN.



America's three most well known Supermen: KIRK ALYN, CHRISTOPHER REEVE and GEORGE REEVES.

(DuMont; 1951), CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT (syndicated; 1953), ROD BROWN OF THE ROCKET RANGERS (CBS; 1953), and ROCKY JONES- SPACE RANGER (syndicated; 1953). But I'm in no position to speak, since in the 1950s, I was but a glimmer in my father's eye as he tried to cop a feel from his date, who'd later become my mother. Since I wasn't conceived until well after the 1950s, and since none of these are currently repeated and are hard to find on home video, reviewing them is difficult. But again, in time, this publication hopes to go indepth on all this stuff; though for now, information is more scarce than a Susan Smith Daycare Center.

The 1960s were the Golden Age of American Superheroes. Even so, part of the fun in American superheroes was the work of an oriental, the one and only Bruce Lee as Kato in THE GREEN HORNET (ABC; 1966). Without Bruce's unbeatable kung fu kicks & chops, THE GREEN HORNET would lack even half the excitement of its sister series, that wacky, campy, tacky BATMAN (ABC; 1966-'68). But what both programs proved was that the boring old days of people yelling, "It's a bird, it's a plane", etc. had died like slugs in a jar of salt! The 1960s were far more exciting times, since Adam West's BATMAN show & GREEN HORNET came out when we yankees finally found out about martial arts (okay, so judo & jujitsu were practiced by Americans in the 1940s & 1950s, but this never had a major, visual affect on movies or TV). While Batman's fighting technique was more boxing than martial arts, the idea of a single hero (or two, if you count Robin) beating up several villains at once in a fast paced battle is big fun, no matter how silly it's done. The gadgets & gimmicks of these shows also showed that the 1960s heroes had come a long way; from the



Van Williams played GREEN HORNET and Bruce Lee didn't!

Green Hornet's Black Beauty (a hearse-like car) and 'Hornet Sting' (a cane which fired gas and opened locked doors), to Batman's Batmobile & Utility Belt, high tech weapons added more excitement.

During the 1970s, one of America's more amusing attempts was the ABC series from 1975, WONDER WOMAN (the show was campy, but the high point was Linda Carter's stunning bodd), but then, anything looked good compared to dull crap like THE SIX MILLION DOLLAR MAN (ABC; 1973) and THE BIONIC WOMAN (ABC; 1976)! No, I take that back. Remember Saturday morning kiddie trash such as SHAZAM! (CBS; 1975), ISIS (CBS; 1975), and Sid & Marty Kroft's ELECTRA WOMAN AND DYNA GIRL (ABC; 1976)? Okay, so Filmation, Sid & Marty Kroft etc. were probably avoiding censors who whine about violence on children's TV, as political correctness began showing its ugly head. Gone were the days of Kato's kung fu kicks or Adam West's Batman punching The Riddler into unconsciousness. American parents wanted positive role models, education and constructive morals for the kiddies, resulting in Captain Marvel (on SHAZAM!) telling us to look both ways before crossing the street. These tame, goody two-shoes heroes made the 1950s Superman (George Reeves) seem like a real nose breaker! I'm not condemning positive morals for kids, but the focus of this magazine is action, not telling boys & girls things (i.e. common sense) their parents should have told them.

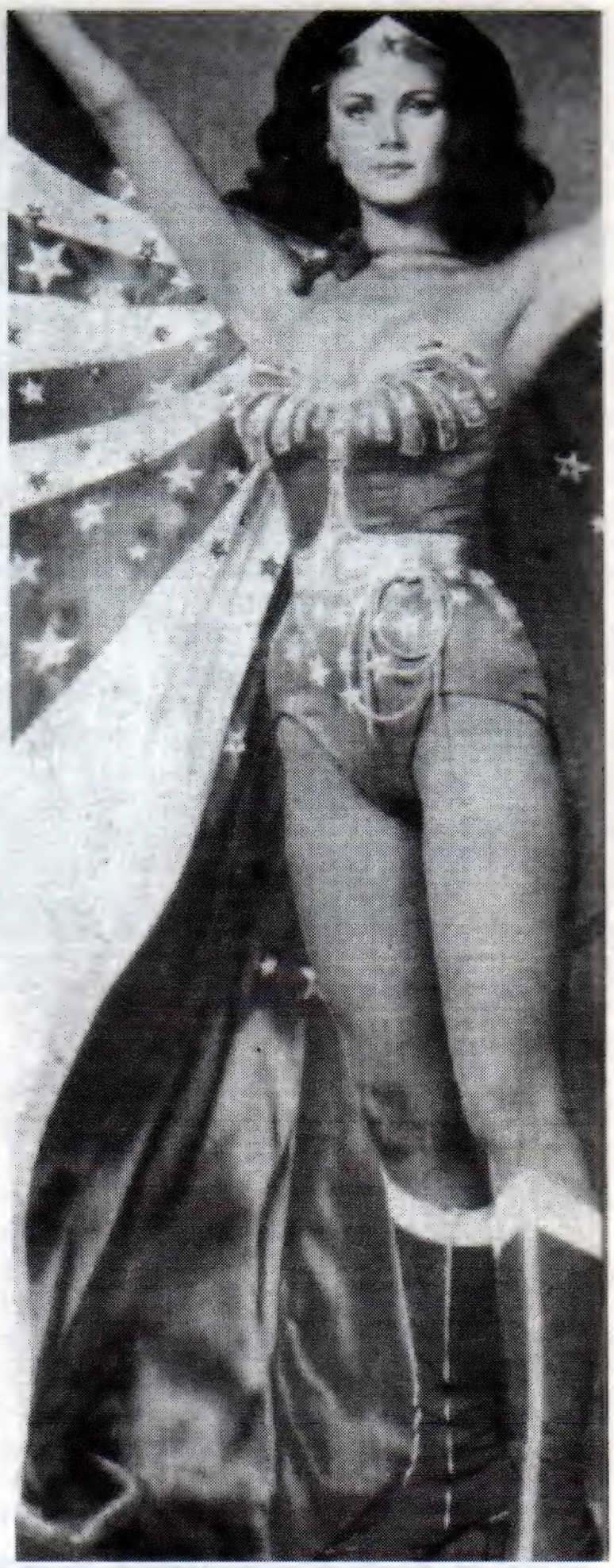
By the 1980s, I'd given up on all American superheroes. I never could sit through an episode of THE FLASH or THE GREATEST AMERICAN HERO (except for an episode featuring a blonde female hero- she was a real knock out in more ways than one). Robotic TV heroes like CAPTAIN POWER & THE SOLDIERS OF THE FUTURE, and SUPER FORCE were remotely sufficient, but how many of you remember PHOTON?! Shot on video and very colorful, but more exciting than ELECTRA WOMAN AND DYNA GIRL and other 1970s losers. PHOTON looked like an early, pre-POWER RANGERS hybrid. A joint production between Japanese and American companies (it tried to combine the best of both worlds), about a team of heroic adventurers who's motto was, "The Light Shines". The costumes were very Japanese-inspired, the main hero looked like Brandon Lee, and a beautiful actress has his assistant superheroine. It had stupidity along with amusing action & FX. Any info on this oddity would be appreciated!

At first it looked like the 1990s would be as lame in America as the 1980s were, but at least the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLE movies offered kung fu stuntwork from HK's Golden Harvest.



But starting in 1989, the big box office draw appeared to be the new BATMAN films with Michael Keaton, and later Val Kilmer. TV gave us the ROBOCOP show and a black superhero called MANTIS, but of any 1990s genre to take America by storm, it was (and at the time of this writing, still is), of course those legendary POWER RANGERS, and their followers V.R. TROOPERS. Now it seems America learned what China learned in the 1970s: You just can't make an exciting superhero without Japanese footage! Japanese TV shows like ZYU RANGERS, GRIDMAN, SPIELVAN, DAI RANGER and METALDER began getting mutated into American adaptations: POWER RANGERS, SUPERHUMAN SAMURAI CYBER SQUAD and VR TROOPERS. This is not a case of direct translation & dubbing (ala' SPECTREMAN & ULTRAMAN), but the most deceitful editing since Sandy Frank spliced 7-Zark-7 into Japan's GATCHAMAN (Tatsunoko; 1972), resulting in the mid-1970s BATTLE OF THE PLANETS! The Japanese actors in ZYU RANGERS, etc., are clipped out, and in come new shots of American replacements (I thought this type of deceitful editing went out with Raymond Burr in GODZILLA). Ironically, the new American actors in programs like POWER RANGERS and VR TROOPERS play their parts well, and in a few cases, are even more limber & energetic than the original Japanese actors they replaced! If nothing else, Japanese superheroes, in one form or another, have finally returned to the American spotlight.

Part of the reason I'm so tolerant of POWER RANGERS is because it's just about the most exciting thing on American TV. Other American superheroes of the 1990s include more NINJA TURTLE movies, more ROBOCOP movies, Michael Keaton's (now Val Kilmer's) BATMAN movies, THE MASK, GUYVER, METEORMAN, and BLANKMAN; most of which I consider as much fun as watching ice melt in slow motion. The only 100% American series to mock POWER RANGERS is the appallingly bad TATTOOED TEENAGE ALIEN FIGHTERS FROM BEVERLYHILLS, trashed last issue. So considering the competition, it's no surprise that because of their Japanese roots, the POWER RANGERS continue to kick butt. The story of American superheroes on film & TV seems to be mutating into the story of Japanese superheroes taking over. It's another case of the economy putting American money in Japanese wallets; first it was cars, then TVs, then radios, then VCRs, now it's superheroes! Scheduled to hit American shores are such wellknown Japanese heroes as CYBERCOP, KAMEN RIDER BLACK, and JIRAIYA, though it's a sure bet they'll be given unfamiliar new names too.



SUPERHEROES IN KOREA



In 1903 came Korea's WARRIOR OF JUSTICE, which consisted largely of a live performance, but 'filmed' scenes were included for outdoor shots. There were numerous play/movie hybrids like this in Korea, called 'Kino Dramas'. Whether or not it could be considered a traditional superhero movie is unknown, but it's believed it was an early, generally silent period film, possibly involving the same dancelike swordplay as seen in Chinese opera.

But Korea was always a turbulent country, dealing with problems within, and paranoid of invasions from outside sources, and rightly so. Naturally, the people of Korea had more serious things to deal with than refining their superhero creations. Besides, info on old Korean superhero movies (assuming they even exist) is more difficult than finding peace in the Middle East. There was Na Un-gyu's ARIRANG (1926), which I hear involved an anti-Japanese hero, but I doubt the use of the word 'hero' is the type of hero we're thinking of, and I assume this propaganda movie to be just another crime drama/adventure of some

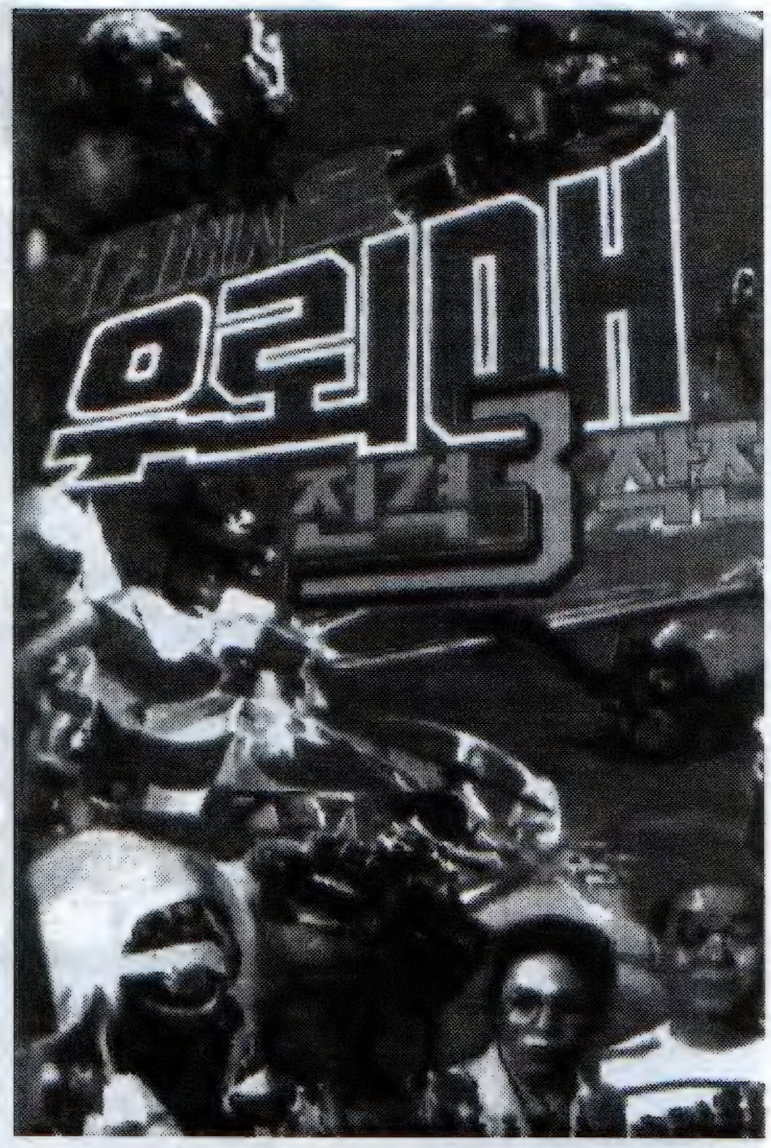


kind.

In the 1960s, thanks to Korean sci-fi movies (inspired by the Japanese stuff) like WANG MA GUI and DAI KOESU YONG-KARI (which came to American TV as "Yongary, Monster from the Deep"), Korea was finally opening itself to foreign influence and had begun experimenting with special effects. But a Korean superhero movie was yet to be born. Japanese superhero TV shows, however, got heavy airplay in Korea during the 1970s, but were often defeated in the ratings by a mostly American TV station! So sci-fi heroes were considered exclusively children's stuff, and Korea never seemed to imitate the it, content to dub Japanese programs in Korean.

Censorship advocate General Park was assassinated in 1985, so Korean movie makers were allowed to imitate Japan, which until now was considered an unwanted invader (details are sketchy, but many Japanese movies are still banned in Korea for being too Japanese!). Perhaps the first example of a Korean superhero movie was UREME, starring infantile comedian Shim Hyung Rei. Though dirt cheap and basically an unintentional comedy, its bizarre combination of cheap live action and typical Japanese-style animation set the pace for the remainder of the UREME films, which 'til today have been a whoppin' seven films! The budget got a little better with each film, and additional action/comedy heroes have appeared in Korea in the late 1980s and 1990s, including: SPARKMAN, the SUPER HONG GIL-TONG series, the STREETFIGHTER series on TV, SUPERBATMAN AND MAZINGA V, THUNDER BIGMAN, YOUNG GU AND THE GOLDEN BAT, TAE KWON ROBOT 1990, HERO FLASH, DENG CHIRI AND SSANG RAITU, and EAGLE MAN. Many are good, many are boring, but all have tiny budgets and rely on resourcefulness to make it worthwhile. Like other Korean things (names, clothes, food, language, etc.) these films look like a cross between Japanese and Chinese stuff.

If one man rose above the Korean hero scene, it's that childish, Korean Lou Costello himself, Shim Hyung Rei. His constant mugging and hamming it up for the camera may be too embarrassing for adults to watch, but the kiddies seem to enjoy his productions



enough to make him the Steven Spielberg of Korea! He starred in the UREME films, the YOUNG GU films, the SUPER HONG GIL TONG films and was title hero in SPARKMAN, and over the years, has gathered quite a following in Seoul. In more recent years, he's taken to directing dinosaur films like YOUNG GU AND THE DINOSAUR JUJU and TYRANNO'S CLAW, the Korean answer to ONE MILLION YEARS B.C.!

As for Korean superheroes, they're not well known outside Korea, but they definitely exist, and Korea is becoming a major hotbed of superhero activity! H.O.F. will keep you posted, as Korea is a superhero maker to be reckoned with!

Top left: UREME 8. Above: UREME 3. Below: Villainess from UREME 8.



SUPERHEROES MEXICAN



In Mexico, it seems that "superhero" in synonymous with "wrestler", for whatever reason. Their first wrestling movie was LA BESTIA MAGNIFICA (Producciones Hidalgo; 1952), about two brothers that trained night and day to be the champion wrestler, yet one turns to crime and the other doesn't. It was more popular than mustaches on traffic cops, and turned its two stars into huge commodities. With the success of that flick, another film came out, hot on the heals of LA BESTIA and it featured the image of wrestler Huracan Ramirez; the wrestler sold the rights to his name and image, to Cinematografica Roma, for the films. 1952 also saw the release of the film EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA, which featured the wrestler Medico Asesino. He wore a mask that closely resembled Santo's (all silver), which explains why people think that this is Santo's first movie. Santo was far more popular, thus Medico Asesino changed his mask to all white.

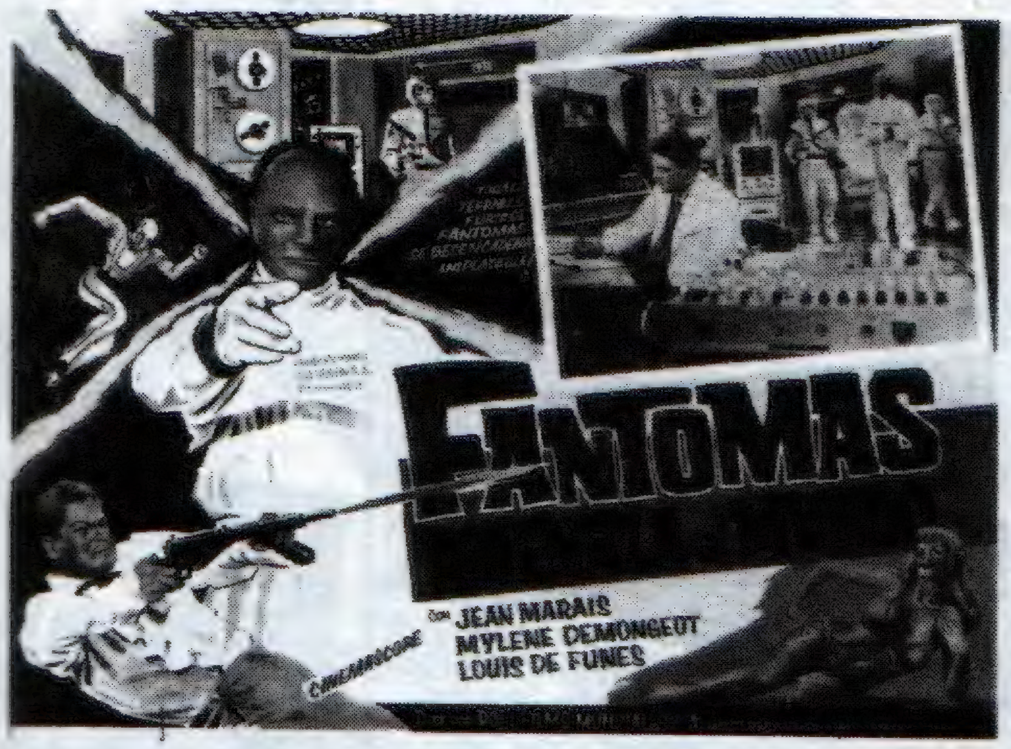
1954's LO SOMBRA VENGADORA starred El Rayo De Jalisco (another wrestler) who appeared in a total of nine films in just six years. He started out playing a non-wrestling hero in sci-fi westerns, but in his last two films he did indeed wrestle. Fernando Oses was a real wrestler, but never wrestled in the ring as La Sombra. But he did give permission to another wrestler, who did wrestle under that name. 1957 saw a huge, in fact more films in that year than any other year to date, ten films. And it was the year that a certain Aztec wrestling god emerged in Rafeal Portillo's LA MOMIA AZTECA and LA MALDICIONS DE LA MOMIA AZTECA (both in 1957), and would also appear in a 1960s flick which came to America as THE ROBOT VS. THE AZTEC MUMMY. Last but not least was the debut of the great El Santo in the 1958 film SANTO CONTRA EL CEREBRO DEL MAL. It was such a huge success that it blew away the "legitimate" films of that year, thus catapulting Santo to cinematic history.

But on American, English dubbed TV, Neutron is the best known of the Mexican superheroes. He had six whole films dubbed into English. Neutron was a masked superhero, but not necessarily a wrestler. He was portrayed by wrestler-turned-actor Wolf Ruvinski, who is now retired from films but is the Mexican Wrestler's Association President. Neutron's 1960 debut was NEUTRON EL ENMASCARADO NEGRA, but American audiences know him for his roles in films like NEUTRON VS. THE DEATH ROBOTS and NEUTRON VS. DR. CARONTE. Another movie with "Neutron" in the title wasn't even a Neutron movie, it had a character called Gold Mask and the film was inaccurately called NEUTRON VS. THE INVISIBLE KILLER (1960).

1962 saw the rise and fall of another masked wrestler called Tormenta (storm). He never wrestled in the ring and was featured only in two films: SENOR TORMENTA and TORMENTA EN EL RING. The shortest film career of any wrestler has to be that of La Sombra Blanca, in the 1963 flick LA SOMBRA BLANCA. The trend of the short-lived heroes continued in the 1964 film ASESINO INVISABLE and it featured the character Enmascarado De Oro in his first and last movie. To add insult to injury, in the English dubbed version, he was called Neutron. A bizarre two film series made in 1964 was ENDEMONIADOS DEL RING and MANO QUE APRIETA. Their costumes were that of an angel and a devil. This team was probably the forerunner of the team-ups like Santo (which means 'Saint') & Blue Demon. The last of the weird masked heroes was Rocambloe, the Mexican answer to Batman. He was a run-of-the-mill hero, and not a wrestler, and appeared in two films: ROCAMBLOE VS. SECTA DEL ESCORPION and ROCAMBLOE VS LAS MUJERES ARPIAS. The 1960s saw the film debut of the Blue Demon's movies, who was second only to El Santo.

It's commonly agreed by anyone with eyesight that roughly the decade 1964-1974 was the high point in Mexi-wrestling films. Most of Neutron's movies were made during that time, as were several other immensely entertaining classics, like the exciting MUMMIES OF GUANAJUATO (see where it's reviewed





in this issue's Reviews). Naturally, with movies like this (and its sequel CASTLE OF THE MUMMIES OF GUANAJUATO) at the peak of Mexi-wrestling movies, the only direction to go was downhill. Later efforts could not re-capture the excitement of the late 1960s & early 1970s.

The start of Lucha Libre movies in the 1970s saw the film debut of real life wrestler Tienmblis, who still wrestles today, as well as his son. His first appearance was in the film CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE, and during his 13 year film career he was support to the likes of Santo, Blue Demon and Mil Mascaras. The next hero was Superzan, who was the creation of Producciones Filmacas Agrasanchaz. He started out as a superhero who battled space invaders, but later became a real-life wrestling star. He was one of the few wrestlers who went from the screen to the ring, instead of the opposite. His first film was SUPERZAN EL INVISIBLE (1971), and went on to star in six more films throughout the 1970s. Another of the throw-away heroes was Fantasma Blanca, another of Agrasanchaz's creations. He was never more than a support character in any of the five films he was in. He was invented to replace Medico Asesino in the CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE series. El Rayo De Jalisco was a fairly popular real life wrestler, who got into films to replace another wrestler, the almost identical La Sombra Vengadora in one of the CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE films. In the wrestling world he was a big deal, but on the screen, a nobody. He is only credited with three films in 1972. That same year, we saw the team of LEONES DEL RING, a two film series that in the first film featured mostly just unmasked heroes. The second film LEONES DEL RING CONTRA LA COSA NOSTRA featured a team of three masked heroes. 1973 was the debut of a motorcycle riding team, Los Jaguares in LOS JAGUARES VS. EL INVASAROES MISTERIOSO and KARLA VS LOS JAGUARES. They were an import from Columbia and made only the two films.

The 1980s proved that all good things must come to an end. Wrestling films included; thanks to stricter TV violence laws, and waning interest in wrestling in general. It's no wonder that this decade, like the 1990s was so dismal. The 1980s saw the debut of Santo's inferior son, Hijo Del Santo. EL SANTO EL ENMASCARADO DE PLATA was typical of the terrible new crop of Mexi-wrestling movies; slow-paced, talky, cheap and dreadfully done. For a comparison, watch a masterpiece like MUMMIES OF GUANAJUATO, and compare it with more contemporary crap like last issue's LUCHA A MUERTE.



SUPERHEROES



JAPANESE

ZONE FIGHTERS

Only an absolute moron, the type of person who listens to George Michaels and believes everything Rush Limbaugh says doesn't know that cinematic superheroes as we know them got their first inspiration from comic books. However, the focus of this totally awesome magazine is movies, not comics. But yet again I must confirm that Japan had comic books ('manga', as they're called by Japanese and American fans who think they too speak Japanese), possibly even cartoons before Japan's first live action hero made his appearance in the 1950s. One early comic book was the influential OGON BATTO ("Golden Bat"), from Takeo Nagamatsu's 1930 comic book series. Like so many other Japanese manga heroes, this character (basically a skull-faced, flying mummy with a heart of gold) would later appear in an animated cartoon series, the B&W theatrical classic OGON BATTO (Toei; 1966), and even a Korean-made sequel called YOUNG GU AND THE GOLDEN BAT (Hana Home Video; 1992).

But before Golden Bat made it to the screen, Shintoho ("New Toho"), a branch off the original Toho Movie Co. had already created Starman, Japan's first live action superhero! Called "Super Giant"

(an illogical name, as he's no Ultraman!) in Japan, these B&W serials were produced from 1957 to 1959. Although Starman's basic design was obviously influenced by our own Superman and Captain Marvel, the Starman theatrical series was ahead of its time; it was the first Japanese series to deal with a solitary superhero, using crude martial arts (you gotta' remember! This was the 1950s! You were lucky to find an actor who'd even heard of judo!) to waste entire armies of alien invaders. These serials had limited budgets, but considering what little yen Shintoho had to work with, the series had adequate production values & continuity; it was no blockbuster, but succeeded in its task-- to entertain! The episodes would later get released as feature length movies, dubbed in English and sold to American TV as EVIL BRAIN FROM OUTERSPACE (see last issue), ATOMIC RULERS (reviewed this issue), and two others (coming to future issues): ATTACK FROM SPACE and INVADERS FROM SPACE. Starman officially ignited the superhero craze in Japan, as imitators like Prince of Space, National Kid, Gekko Kamen, Messenger of Allah, Space Chief, and of course, Golden Bat were soon to follow, in their own movies and TV shows.

Of Japan's 1960s superhero stars, none was more prolific than Shinichi (later dubbed 'Sonny') Chiba, who later contributed even more to Japan's growing superhero scene in the 1970s, but more on that later. Though the young Sonny Chiba made his acting debut in crime dramas like POLICE STATION STORY and 1960's THE DRIFTING DETECTIVE, it was his appearance in B&W superhero productions like RAINBOW MASK, INVASION OF THE NEPTUNEMEN and MESSENGER OF ALLAH which really boosted his career, and the career of Japanese superheroes. Superheroes had helped Chiba greatly, so he'd return the favor in the 1970s.

Full color superheroes finally appeared in the mid-1960s. 1966's MAGUMA TAISHI (aka "Goldar", and "Space Giants") was the first hint of things to come, but it was the classic, influential ULTRAMAN (just keep reading this magazine's "Ultra-Scan" column, and you'll be an expert on Ultraman and his brothers), and sequels like ULTRASEVEN and ULTRAMAN ACE which finally made superheroes household words in Japan!

Toei's KAMEN RIDER (see "Kamen Rider Report", your ultimate guide to everyone's favorite grasshopper motorcyclists) debuted in 1971, and featured Shinichi/Sonny Chiba's long overdue return to superheroism. Though he himself never appeared in this action packed series, many of his proteges, including his brother Jiro Chiba (aka Jiro Yabuki) did. While the comparatively low key (until recent years, that is!) Kamen Riders lacked the Godzillian FX of Tsuburaya's programs (i.e. ULTRAMAN and MIRRORMAN), it featured more karate action than any superhero series or movie before it, as did its imitations: KAMEN RIDER V3, BAROM 1, KAMEN RIDER X, KIKAIDER, KIKAIDER 0-1, THE KAGE STAR, KAMEN RIDER AMAZON, and far too many more to list, since the 1970s quickly become the Golden Age of Japan's action heroes! Hell, even grand-daddies like the Ultra Brothers (younger ones) got in on the action; the likes of ULTRAMAN LEO and ULTRAMAN 80 had to pack in far more karate chops if they were to compete with DENJIN ZABOGA, KAI KETSU ZUBAT, etc.

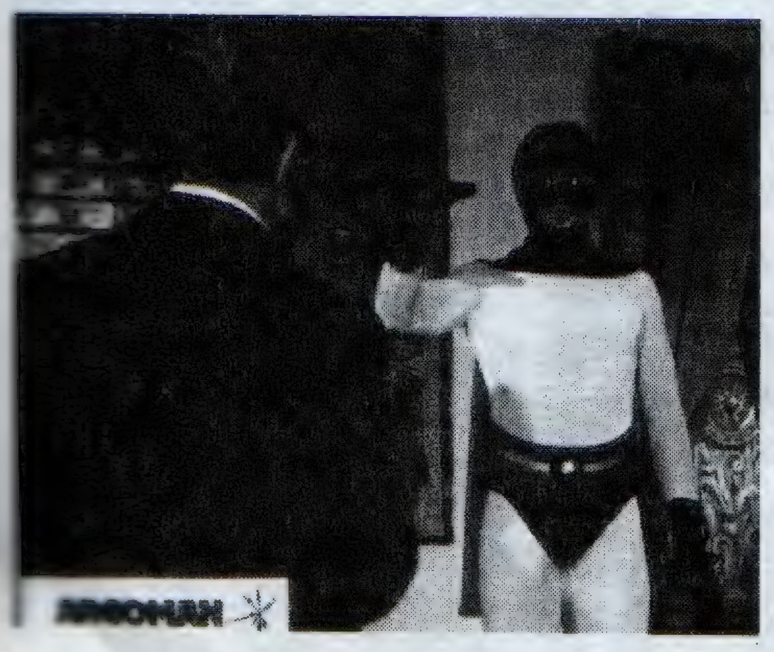
All good things, including Japanese superheroes, must come to an end. The Ultramen basically disappeared from Japanese TV after 1980. Excessive 'violence' on kiddie TV caused a boycott from parents, so there's a gradual decline in 1980s programs, actionwise. Making up for a lack of martial arts action, Toei improved their FX considerably. There were a couple years in the early 1980s when the action had not yet been whimped down, and the FX had become quite good. So I still think the cream of the crop was with early 1980s shows like SUN VULCAN and SPACE SHERIFF GAVAN, as it was all downhill after 1984. So as I've said hundreds of times, the late 1980s TV shows like METALDER, BAIKLOSSAR, MACHINEMAN and JIBAN are okay, FX-wise. They're average sci-fi fun. But to anyone who remembers the karate choppin' good old days of KAMEN RIDER and ZONE FIGHTER, the limp-wristed, toned down exploits of glossy late 1980s heroes are pathetically lackluster.

So now it's the 1990s, and Japanese superheroes only exist to sell overpriced toys. Since BATTLE FEVER J's debut in 1979, the Sentai genre has been the dominant series, virtually monopolizing superhero TV in Japan (and in America too, as POWER RANGERS is just the latest remake of a generic tale that got old back in 1984!). The alternate heroes who have appeared over the years, like SOLBRAVER, WINSPECTOR, EXCEED-DRAFT and BLUE SWAT are even more tamer and toned down, often about as exciting as watching ice melt-- in slow motion. So with Japanese superheroism crumbling in excitement, what lies ahead? Well, while the new TV shows may suck, made-for-video movies offer a glimmer of hope. Both Ultraseven and newer Kamen Riders have returned to appear in hour-long, sometimes feature length adventures designed to appeal more to adults. Though intriguing, they're often talky, and require translation if you don't speak Japanese. These movies aren't masterpieces, but seem to be the only light at the end of the tunnel we call Japanese superheroism.

SUPERHEROES ITALIAN



Until somebody proves me wrong (no major difficulty, it happens as often as bearded fat men showing up at sci-fi cons), why not consider the B&W silent film, CABIRIA (1924) to be Italy's superhero film numero uno?! This was the first "Sword & Sandal" film, starring Bartolomeo Pagano, who played 'Maciste the Mighty', the prototypical sword-wielding muscleman. Over the years, Bartolomeo Pagano played the Roman do-gooder in thirty movies. This inspirational film series ignited the many Italian 'Sword & Sandal' films about Hercules, Goliath, & Ulysses, which have long since become more common than painting's of The Last Supper in a Catholic neighborhood. If these Sword & Sandal flicks are a form of superhero movie, then so are westerns about characters like the Lone Ranger, Zoro & the Cisco Kid, who I might reserve for future articles. For the remainder of this article which is both informing & amusing you, I won't mention the continuing Sword & Sandal films (that too will be looked at much later, as they're a whole sub-genre within themselves; divided into sub-factions or whatever), but only mentioned CABIRIA for its historical importance.



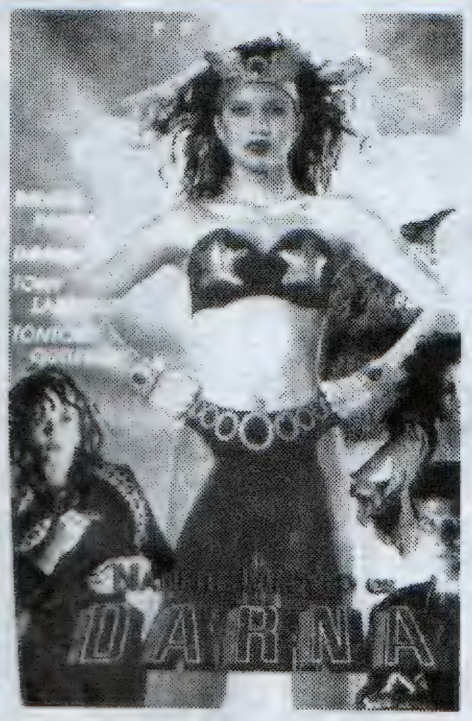
Santo's Mexican wrestling movies flicks were popular enough in Italy to influence two decent movies about the wrestler Super Argo. In fact, Italy is where the amusement really starts! One of the many reasons I started H.O.F. was to introduce people to 1967's THE THREE FANTASTIC SUPERMEN! Influenced not only by Santo, but BATMAN & GREEN HORNET too, these guys pack in a lot of punch! The first two films are full of acrobatics and karate-inspired skirmishes, and are way ahead of their times! During the course of this seven-part film series (the last in 1986), the three heroes took on mad scientists, Russian spies, cowboys, samurais, cannibals, gangsters, secret agents, Chinese kung fu masters and who knows what else?! I was amazed to see non-Asian heroes using acrobatic martial arts (long considered exclusively Far Eastern tactics until the 1970s at least) in the 1960s. But the original American Superman's costume was based on that of circus acrobatics, which may explain why the Italians incorporated it into their Supermen (though the U.S.A.'s Clark Kent never did a single cartwheel that I recall!).

Unlike SUPERARGO & Santo, the laughs in the "3 Supermen" movies were intentional, twas all meant to be humorous. There were other campy films out of Italy too, though many are more 'secret agent' and/or 'master criminal' type stuff. The separation between these spy capers and superhero films is quite blurry (in fact, Supermen Brad Harris & Tony Kendall were originally in a series of spy films called the KARMISSAR X flicks). The 3 Supermen & other Italian heroes sometimes used fancy, high-tech gadgets (somewhere inbetween James Bond devices and those on Batman's utility belt), which occasionally lumped the hero flicks in with the spy genre. In fact, possibly the first Italian superhero movie, Umberto Lenzi's KRIMINAL (1966) was very much influenced by the spy stuff. Additional 1960s heroes included movies like PHENOMENAL AND THE TREASURE OF TUTANKAMEN (Rugerro





Two other actresses who have played Filipino super heroine DARNA; (left) Anjanette Abayari, (below) Vilma Santos.



stuff, the Filipinos seem to have made only one Japanese-inspired superhero movie that I know of, the el cheapo Sentai BIOKIDS (Regal International; 1990), a ripoff of Toei's BIOMAN (1984). BIOKIDS also has the distinction of being the only Filipino superhero film to get dubbed in English for release on American home video. Why there haven't been more Japanese-ish heroes in the Philippines may be because in the late 1970s, slimy dictator Ferdindand Marcos considered them 'too violent', or a 'bad influence' (like he was in any position to talk) on the young viewers. Details are sketchy, but I believe the show which was the biggest target was the Japanese cartoon VOLTUS V, which got banned despite its being one of the hottest programs in Filipino history.

But of all the Filipino superheroes, the most wellknown is still Darna, their blatant answer to Wonder Woman. Mars Revilo created the original DARNA comic books in 1970s, and to date, there have been at least three Darna movies:

1. I don't know the title of the first Darna movie, but was probably just "DARNA". Our heroinne was played by Vilma Santos.

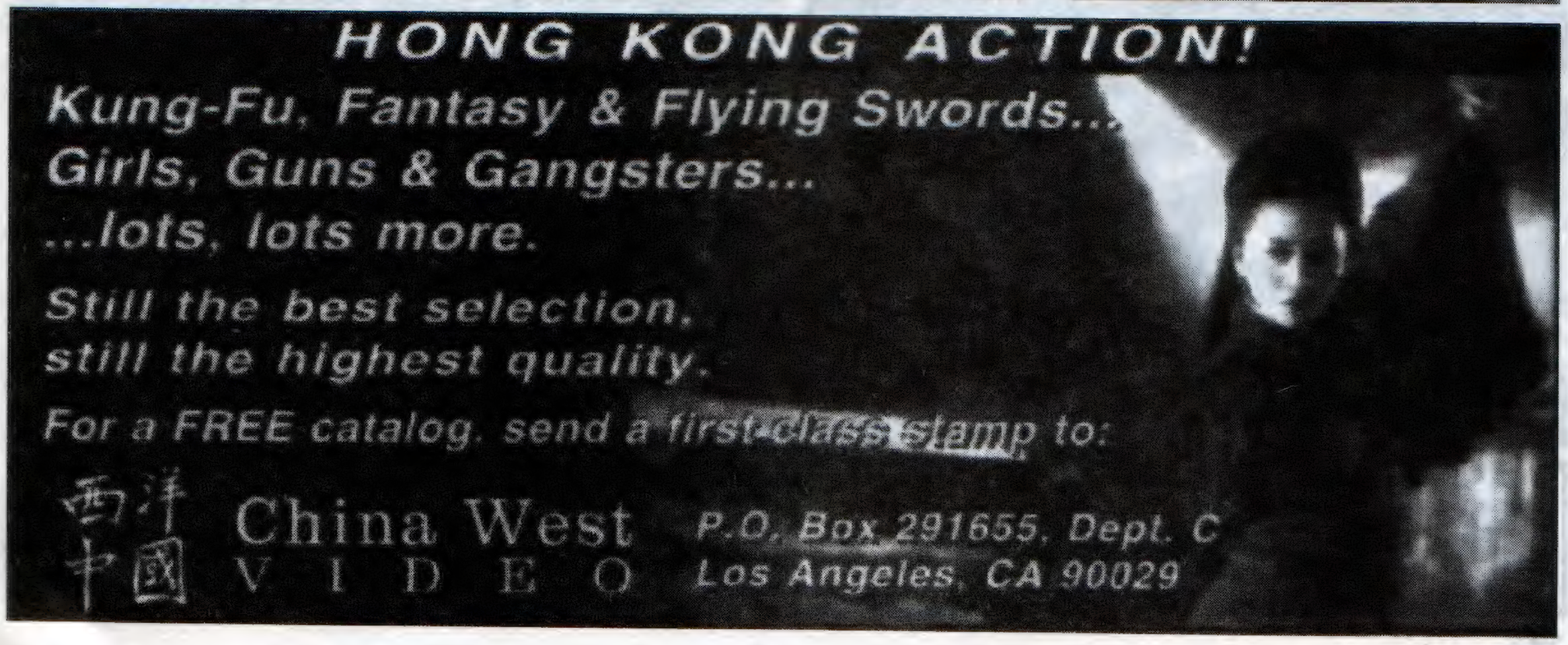
2. 1991's DARNA, starring Nanette Medved as Darna is probably available in your local Filipino videostore. Though many think the 1991 DARNA sucks, it's somewhat more watchable than average Filipino cinema.

3. By far the best Darna movie to date is 1994's DARNA ANG PAGBALIK. There are a couple enjoyable action scenes, fine special effects, and a decent performance by the voluptuous, strikingly sexy Anjanette Abayari as lead heroine Darna.

But sadly, for every watchable Darna movie, there are plenty of poor superhero movies in the Philippines. No budget, lackluster trash like SUPER NAMAN, KUMANDER BAWANG (both reviewed last issue), and the absolutely dismal SUPERMOUSE AND THE ROBO RATS (Regal Films; 1989) give both Filipinos and superheroes alike a bad name. Surprisingly, Tony Reyes & Joey De Leon, the morons who produced both SUPERMOUSE and the STARZAN flicks occasionally produce remotely tolerable (or mildly amusing, at best) films like SHEMAN- MISTRESS OF THE UNIVERSE (Viva Video; 1988), and the notoriously tacky ALYAS BATMAN EN ROBIN (Regal International; 1991). All these super cheap, generally dull movies vary in quality from terrible, to bad, to not quite so bad, to semi-watchable if you've got a lot of time on your hands. These are comedies, sometimes musicals too, and the emphasis is never on real heroics or action. This should be obvious when you look at the titles; most of these are quick-buck satires of American films. Filipino movies are produced exclusively for their third world audience, none of these movies (except BIOKIDS and maybe DARNA ANG PAGBALIK) would be of any interest to American audiences.

For years I've been predicting the slow improvements in Filipino cinema will eventually bring them into the international spotlight. Well, I spoke too soon, I've been proved wrong! But I still think DARNA ANG PAGBALIK and DUGU NG PANDAY (about a sword wielding folk hero of Filipino legend) are entertaining adventures in their own right, worthy of international attention.







Deodato; 1967), FLASHMAN (1967, not to be confused with Toei's Japanese show of the same name), and 1968's SATANIK. Also worth checking out is an amusing wrestling hero called GOLDFACE, THE FANTASTIC SUPERMAN. The music is delightfully campy, the fights are decent, and there are a few genuine laughs as Goldface (and his witch-doctor sidekick) pursues the villains. Then of course was ARGOMAN, and although the movie itself really sucked, it was a classic example of what it would be like if James Bond wore a superhero outfit. For whatever reason, 'Argo' is a popular name in Italy, not only is there Argoman and Super Argo, but another hero called Argos, in the film ARGOS IL FANTASTICO SUPERMAN.

Unfortunately, it's difficult to know what came out of Italy after the 1960s, which was probably the heyday of 'spaghetti superheroes'. In the 1970s, the Chinese lent a helping hand, resulting in co-productions like THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE ORIENT and the inferior AMAZONS AND SUPERMEN (aka "Super Stooges vs. the Wonder Women"). Unfortunately, later movies like THE PUMAMAN, THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE GODFATHER, and SUPERSONIC MAN (all from 1979) are harder to find than an intelligent guest on THE RICHARD BEY SHOW. Those who have seen SUPERSONIC MAN say it sucks bit time. The final "Three Supermen" movie was 1986's SUPERMEN IN SANTA DOMINGO, a disapointing climax.



SUPERHEROES



Nannette Medved as DARNA.

FILIPINO

I must confess I don't know a lot about Filipino superheroes. It's difficult enough to tolerate them dirt cheap Filipino movies, but to analyze any specific genres requires more patience than is humanly possible. Filipino movies, superhero or otherwise are crap! Yet they're intriguing crap.

Strangely, I hear Filipino audiences were reared on Japanese TV; anything from THE SAMURAI (ONMITSU KENSHI in Japanese), to KAMEN RIDER, to VOLTUS V, to SPACE SHERIFF SHIDER. What's even more interesting is I hear them lucky Filipinos got to see these programs actually dubbed in English! While THE SAMURAI was dubbed primarily for Australian release, the dubbings of KAMEN RIDER and other action heroes would appear to be exclusively for audiences in the Philippines. Are there any Filipino readers out there who can supply us poor, deprived Americans of English videotapes of live action, Japanese superheroes?! If so, please contact this editor, who will be eternally grateful. Anyway, if Japanese superheroes were so popular in the Philippines, then the question remains: Why haven't they done a lot of imitations of them? Unlike Korea, whose movies frequently imitate Japanese



SENTAI SECTION #2

A LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF SENTAIS IN AMERICA

If'n yall's I.Q. is somewhat higher than that of a common ballpoint pen, brick or a George Michaels fan, you'll no doubt recall [from the previous issue's "Sentai Section"] how early Japanese teams of TV heroes like NINJA BUTAI GEKKO (Toei; 1964), ZONE FIGHTER (Toho; 1972), and TRIPLE FIGHTER (TBS; 1972) helped influence 1974's HIMITSU SENTAI GO RANGERS (also translated as GORANGERS, GORANGER, GORENJA, GORENJA, GORENJER, GORENJYER GORENGER & GORENGA) the program which marked the official beginning of the genre of 'Sentai' ("Task Force"). For this addition of Sentai Section, we'll examine the genre from an alternate view, something besides the typical history of these programs on Japanese TV. The angle this time is from that of an American, and/or Americans, and how the Sentai legacy has crept into the USA over the years.

Though Australians saw the 130-part, B&W NINJA BUTAI GEKKO ("Ninja Team Moonlight") dubbed in English as PHANTOM AGENTS, it was the one & only, full color GO RANGERS (one of the most significant & important programs ever made) which enthralled many an American kiddie in Northern California's bay area back in the mid 1970s. This 84-part series had already had successful, untranslated runs in Sacramento, Los Angeles, and Hawaii, so it seemed like San Francisco, with its large Asian population and culturally aware people would welcome GO RANGERS with open arms, right? Wrong! It only lasted for about ten episodes (they showed, in random order: #38, #39, #25, #26, & #47; those are the only ones I recall seeing for sure, but there were a few more) because self-righteous, presumably American suburbanites protested the TV station and the program's sponsor, Marukai Trading Co., over the 'violence' their kiddies were viewing Sunday nights at 8 P.M. (that's right, a prime time slot!). The complaints are the same uptight whinings we're hearing 20 years later, only now it's them half-breed offsprings the POWER RANGERS who are the targets. But GO RANGERS wasn't an international phenomenon, and had no Saban Entertainment to protect it. So GO RANGERS's limited airing in the bay area was doomed from the start.

But it's also been speculated that Marukai or the TV station possibly only purchased those few episodes, which would explain why it was shown only every other week! It alternated with the robo-cartoon UFO DAI APOLON, which, unlike GO RANGERS offered English subtitles. But UFO DAI APOLON seemed to triumph, it played for a great many months after GO RANGERS's California demise. I also hear JACKERS (Toei; 1977) aired in Southern California.





Above: The FIVE RANGERS, aka GO RANGER.
Right: GO RANGER out of costume.



Because of GO RANGERS's huge commercial success in Hawaii along with KIKAIDA, there were English language books made. Some of this Hawaiian merchandise (which included GO RANGERS T-shirts) was filtered into California, and sold at L.A.'s Little Tokyo and S.F.'s Japan Center. Marketed often as "The Five Rangers" (accurate, literal translation of "Go Ranger"), these picture books were sold side-by-side with original Japanese language imports like dolls, trading cards and books exported from Tokyo. Hell, some of these precious products (now valuable collector's items) actually made their way into suburban food stores which catered to Japanese and/or Asian tastes. But by far, the strangest, unexplained item was a cheap, bootlegged post card from some underground/novelty type store, featuring Momo Ranger (pink) jumping over an American map with the title, "Japanese Giant Races Ahead" written in English. Whoever made this post card probably never heard of GO RANGERS (they're Japanese, but not giants!), but most likely found these popular stickers at a Japanese gift shop and stuck it onto a map to make a quick buck off it.

Hawaii's large Japanese community explains why they saw so damn many Japanese superhero programs in the 1970s, which included such teams as AKUMAIZER 3 (Toei; 1975), and more importantly, BATTLE FEVER J (Toei; 1979). Despite J.A.C. star Kenji Ohba's role as Battle Kenya, BATTLE FEVER J is not a great show by any means. But by the late 1970s and early 1980s, VCR's were becoming accessible to the common man! Therefor, there are at least five English subtitled episodes of BATTLE FEVER J out there which have been preserved. They're making the rounds with bootleggers and tape collectors, but you're lucky if you can come up with a watchable copy. Strangely, watching BATTLE FEVER J with English subtitles is almost a let down, as it just reminds us how infantile the characters & dialogue is! Perhaps some programs are better off if they're not understood.

In an issue of TV Guide (#1776, April 11-17; 1987), the tragic news of Patrick Whitley (former SCTV Producer) buying the rights to DYNAMAN (Toei; 1983) was announced. The action packed series was dubbed as a comedy, or so to speak, and eventually got stuck on late night cable, and only about five episodes were shown, fortunately. DYNAMAN, even in its Japanese form was already intentionally comedic, so unlike Woody Allen's WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY (the grand-daddy of humorous voice-overs), the English DYNAMAN fell flat, and the altered soundtrack (Kensuke Kyo's original music dropped in favor of Top 40 pop hits) didn't help matters much. The English DYNAMAN fiascos, however, were a hit with geeks at sci-fi conventions. Until the Power Rangers came along, uninformed American geekdom referred to anyone from Kamen Rider to Mirrorman as "Dynamen"!

The remainder of the 1980s offered very little (if any) Sentai exposure to the USA. Many programs, including MASKMAN (Toei; 1987) and LIVEMAN (Toei; 1988) were readily available at videostores in San Francisco's Japan Center, and L.A.'s Little Tokyo, but with no translation of any kind. Like so many other current Japanese programs, these shows were recorded off the air in Tokyo and sent to America (with commercials intact) for spots with large Japanese communities. 'Til this day, stores of this nature are still quite profitable, and are an excellent way to check out only the most current programs (tapes over a year old get erased) from Japan. The only problem is the stores are usually only equipped to serve Japanese speakers. Meanwhile, FLASHMAN (Toei; 1986) and other programs got released in Europe, and it's quite an amusing novelty to see the French-dubbed FLASHMAN episodes making the rounds in our own video underground; consult a bootlegger near you! It's still called FLASHMAN, but them French added their own catchy theme song, and it's always amusing to watch Japanese superheroes speaking French! Both France and Italy have seen original Japanese superhero teams like this, which explains why POWER RANGERS was an obsolete failure over there; they had already seen the real thing! I hear that these Euro dubs of FLASHMAN are the work of Saban International, which comes as no surprise.

The next time I recall a Sentai hitting American shores was when the cheap Filipino movie BIOKIDS (Regal International; 1990) actually got full English voice dubbing for its 1991 American release on home video. The translations were entirely faithful this time, but this low budget movie itself could have been better. The whole flick amounted to little more than a lowbudget Filipino combination of both BANKID (Toho; 1976) and



Heroine Peggy Matsuyama, the first ever PINK RANGER!





BIOMAN (Toei; 1984).

And so the 1990s arrive, and them Sentais have been trying to break into the American mainstream for 20 years. But as we've just examined, they were never really accepted- at least, not in 100% Japanese form. So when Saban Entertainment bought the rights to ZYU RANGER (Toei; 1992), nearly all the original Japanese footage was cut, to keep POWER RANGERS (ZYU RANGERS's international title) from bombing in the U.S.A. like its predecessors: GO RANGERS, JACKERS, AKUMAIZER 3, BATTLE FEVER J, DYNAMAN and BIOKIDS. While I question the ethics of this butchering (considered racist by many longtime Sentai fans), the gimmick worked! Now 'spiced up' with an all-American cast who interact with pre-filmed stuff from Japan, the series is one of the most successful American kiddy programs in history! I must confess, despite the deceitful editing and Saban's tendency to take credit for Toei's work, the series is entertaining to all ages. The Japanese FX play well off the American action scenes.

Later, Saban ran out of ZYU RANGER footage, so they concentrated more on filming their own fights and took shots of the White Ranger (formerly the Green Ranger) from DAI RANGER (Toei; 1993). This fall, the Rangers will 'morph' into some sort of 'ninja mode', in order to make use of stock footage from NINJA SENTAI: KAKU RANGER (Toei; 1994). So by now, the over-rated POWER RANGERS have finally scored points for Japan's Sentai genre, by finally conquering the American mainstream and taking no prisoners, after a 20 year struggle for American acceptance! Enough said.



THE SHOTARO ISHIMORI INTERVIEW

まんが家、原作者として第一に作品の創造に心血を注いでいる、石ノ森章太郎氏にお話をおうかがいした。

石ノ森章太郎氏インタビュー

Shotaro Ishimori is a comic writer & cartoonist who wrote several of the comicbook versions of Bandai superhero shows. Ishimori wrote both the comicbook and TV versions of GO RANGERS. The format was the typical five person team, and this, being basically the first of its type, created certain problems for TV scripts. In the KAMEN RIDER series, all the action is centered on one person. But the Sentais require personalities and enough airtime for all five people! We must also keep in mind these shows are written for very young children, typically three to eight years old. Simple characters work best.

Mr. Ishimori designed not only the hero costumes, but the human attire too. The human clothing was inspired by spy movies like the James Bond films. The ranger costumes were designed to be simple, but to display each character's personality, because their own faces are not visible. The name "Go-Ranger" is a pun, which Ishimori really likes to use. "Go" in Japanese means five, and the English word "Go" has a nice ring to it and accurately describes what our heroes do. This type of pun can also be seen in the current Sentai, ORANGER. Soccer is very popular here, and the fans shout "Ore!", their pronunciation of the Spanish "Ole!" The stories are usually based on some kind of spying action. And because this is for children, the drama is very casual, but with pathos. He also uses gags to bring out character traits.

Although difficult, he feels he did a good job on this series. He says he got the idea for GO RANGER characters while writing KIKAIDA. GO RANGER appeared in comic form first, in Shonen Domei (that's for you manga lovers) and was a rival comic to the manga version of JACKERS! Since mangas in Japan are like paperbacks in the states, the comic versions of KAMEN RIDER, KIKAIDA, GO RANGER, JACKERS, etc. may have been more adult, or at least teenaged, in nature. That's one for you manga enthusiasts to answer. And this is the end of the interview, sayonara kiddies! */DF here, the preceding article was loosely translated by John & Setsuko Emma. It was based on an interview with Shotaro Ishimori that originally appeared in TV MAGAZINE's special book on GO RANGERS and JACKER./*





REVIEWS

로보태권V90

ROBO TAE KWON V90

D.B Media; Released 12/5/90, Produced by: Kim Chyung Ki, Starring: Lee Sung Hyung, Kan Ning Chung, Pok Chi Su, Chang Dok Su, Nam Kung Wan, Lee Cheh Ng. Reviewed by Damon Foster

Only the most Korean of Koreans could come up with such unlikely, wacky hybrids as this! It never ceases to amuse me how Korean films so blatantly borrow Chinese & Japanese elements and reshuffle them at random, coming up with odd little sci-fi tales such as ROBO TAE KWON V90! Here's one uneven flick which once or twice seems like a HK kung fu film, featuring typical chop sockey duels (right down to the karate uniforms and challenges), which alternate with scenes of cartoon robots right out of Japan's VOLTRON and/or "Transformers" genre! Of course, it's quite common for generally live action, Korean movies to splice in animated robots, something which they've been doing at least as far back as 1988's UREME #1. Were ROBO TAE KWON V90 from any other country, I'd have thought it was two different movies edited together, but Korean kiddy movies are notoriously over the top, I'm sure its unevenness is intentional.

But superhero fans take note! Just because there are spaceship dog-fights, martial arts duels and giant robots doesn't make this a fast-paced, action packed epic, which it sure as hell is not! There are only three or four karate fights (rather short ones too), and the climactic battle of one-dimensional robots isn't until the end. ROBO TAE KWON V90 liberally gives us uncensored boredom and tedious dialogue, guaranteed to annoy those of us who are Korean language impaired. As a kiddy film, it does its best to fill out the non-action scenes with the usual annoying kids and infantile attempts at humor. But I imagine for kids, this whole movie would be fun. It's a shame nobody has dubbed this movie (and many other Korean hero movies) into English. It would probably be a hit on American TV, as it falls somewhere inbetween POWER RANGERS and SANTA CLAUSE CONQUERS THE MARTIANS.

At one point, some kid in this movie dresses up like a robot with a tea-kettle for a head, and wears that costume for the remainder of the story. I'm not sure what significance this kettle robot has in Korean pop culture, but I've seen him elsewhere, normally in one-dimensional form. He appears to be some logo or mascot, appearing in Korean commercials and labels, sort of their Spuds Mckenzie or California Raisin. There's at least one other non-cartoon robot in ROBO TAE KWON V90. It two is silver and human-sized, but tends to be one of the villains (it's hard to tell sometimes, as too many characters can't decide who's side their on). Speaking of villains, there's a weird menagerie of creatures that require knowledge of the Korean language to understand them. At the beginning, we see some strange animated (they animated actual photos) dwarf; he appears to be rich and commands a lot of authority. But this suit & tie villain doesn't appear again until the end, when it's revealed he had a secret identity as some sort of low-key Darth Vader wannabe who commands a squad of hench-cyborgs in space.

I guess my favorite character, based on my male urges, is a stunning, beautiful blond (some Korean chick in a wig). She's somewhere inbetween curvaceous and anorexic, and, like other characters, seems to alternate between good and bad. One minute she's dueling with the film's main heroine (another slim babe), and in the next, she's sacrificing herself to save the life of an Earth scientist. Other characters are the main hero, a Tae Kwon Do expert who, when he's not practicing his martial arts and accepting challenges from all comers, works for some high-tech space army, piloting spaceships in yet another cheap Korean fusion of ULTRAMAN's Science Patrol and STARBLAZER's Star Force (speaking of which, these crudely drawn & animated spaceship scenes make me actually respect those in STARBLAZERS!).

Though my knowledge of Korean rivals my ability to breathe underwater, I guess this movie is about some elf-like tycoon who 'becomes' an evil space android who looks like Darth Vader and commands an army of hench-androids to hassle green-skinned "slug-men" (?) in outerspace! Meanwhile, some young Korean yuppie practices his kicks and



chops in forests while regretting the death of his young sister who died in a burning building. But our hero isn't left to brood for too long, because some Chinese kung fu master (using a deadly fan) wants to challenge him to a duel. After a cool fight, our boy's opponent gets kidnapped by an alien space craft, and his spirit transferred into that of some animated robot, who therefore can now do kung fu! The aliens are robot invaders, one of which is an indecisive renegade in a tight skirt barely larger than a thread. This blond cutie romances our hero and they go on some leisurely, romantic stroll in a forest (complete with superimposed cartoon birds, rabbits & squirrels) before the protagonist gets jumped by another challenger; sort of a Korean ninja ("sulsa", I believe they might be called). Again there's a decent battle before this human villain is abducted by alien villains to merge his soul & skills with their own huge robot. Meanwhile, a Korean babe discovers that the blond vixen is a robot too, because she feeds by absorbing electricity from household power-outlets! While she energizes, she's nude; but unfortunately, her species of robot has a body of spandex (no nipple or other private parts), incredibly tight though it is. Fortunately, the blond bimbo from space, and the whole legion of invading robots & spaceships are no match for our mighty tae kwon do champ, since he's also an astronaut/pilot who controls spaceships & his own animated giant, Robo Tae Kwon V90! So this title hero takes on and defeats three other karate-kicking robots, but there's a fair amount of missiles and lasers too. ** *-Damon Foster*



Jumborg 9 tackles two villians simultaneously.

NEUTRON THE ATOMIC SUPERMAN VS. THE DEATH ROBOTS

Photography by Fernando Colin, Edited by Juan Munguia, Music: Enuio Cabitate, Story & Adaptation: Alfredo Ruanova, Dir.: Federico Curiel, Starring: Wolf Ruvinski, Julio Aleman, Armando Sylvestre, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Continuity between Neutron's films really sucks, because Mexico's 'masked marvel's main enemy Dr. Caronte seems to die at the end of each movie, yet always returns to life to pester mankind, along with his hilariously dubbed, dwarf sidekick, Nick. Last issue, I sat through NEUTRON VS. DR. CARONTE, so now I'm looking at what I suspect to be its prequel (?), NEUTRON VS. DEATH ROBOTS. I assume this one came before DR. CARONTE, as that film started with scientists examining the same neutron bomb which is first invented at the end of DEATH ROBOTS. It doesn't really matter, I suppose, since these B&W oldies are pretty ridiculous; despite the title, NEUTRON VS. DR. CARONTE, the two titled masked men never fight each other! Yet in DEATH ROBOTS, a film lacking any robots, both guys do finally duke it out! This movie is more entertaining than the one reviewed in the previous HOF, since the production values are mildly better, and there are more fights, Neutron is seen more. Because of this, I would assume DEATH ROBOTS came after DR. CARONTE, but since that movie had both phantoms get unmasked, this one would be obsolete if it were a sequel, as their identities would have been revealed. Oh well, I don't know; I give up! Perhaps it's better not to think too hard when watching an old Mexican superhero farce, never try to figure out the many inconsistencies and plot holes! Just sit down, kick back and enjoy the fun!

Though the word 'wrestling' is never used, and we never see masked fighters Neutron or Caronte in any matches, NEUTRON VS. THE DEATH ROBOTS can otherwise be considered a typical Mexican wrestling movie. The flavor is anything but Mexican, but more closely resembling American B-movies of the 1950s; same music, B&W production values, low key approach, etc. Were it not for two scenes of babe Nora singing Spanish songs in a nightclub (where all the men seem to want to marry her), you might never guess it was a Mexican movie, despite obvious voice dubbing. Were it not for its English dubbing, I never could have sat through this lackluster film.

Plot-wise, that masked scientist Dr. Caronte is at it again! His new experiment involves these three brains from dead scientists, which he revives so they can tell him and his tiny assistant Nick (dubbed in a silly voice) how to make bombs. Keeping the brains alive requires human blood, so Caronte again unleashes his zombies (big men wearing jumpsuits, Halloween masks and long, black wigs) to go kill people & snatch their blood. Since the blood is taken from their necks, the obligatory police inspector and his goofy assistant think vampires are on the loose in Mexico! But eventually, Neutron gets to the bottom of this, and destroys the brains & battles it out with Caronte. It's a cool fight (with Neutron as the victor, of course), as are his two or three fights with the zombies (scattered through out the film amid mile-wide gaps of dialogue & filler). ** *-Damon Foster*

ジャンボーグA

JUMBORG ACE

(aka "Jumbog Ace", "Janborg Ace", "Zanborg A", "Jyanbogu Eisu", and other inaccurate mistranslations; it's official name is "Jumborg"; a combination of 'jumbo' & 'cyborg') Produced by Tsuburaya Productions & Mainichi Broadcasting for airing on TV Asahi, lasting from 1/17/73 to 12/29/73, Consisting of 50 episodes, Created by Hajime Tsuburaya, Writers: Shigemitsu Taguchi, Hiroyasu Yamaura, Shigemitsu Taguchi, & Bunzo Wakazuki Directors: Shunkei



JUMBORG ACE



Jumborg Ace and his interior pilot Naoki.

Suzuki, Yoshiyuki Kuroda, Shohei Tojo, Toshisugu Suzuki, Hiromi Higuchi & Jun Oki, SPFX Directors: Koichi Takano, Noburo Yajima, Yuichi Manoda, Jun Oki, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, FX Art Dir.: Tetsuzo Ozawa, Starring Naoki Tachibana as himself (?), & Jun Tazaki, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Despite rather unimpressive opening credits, concentrating exclusively on our hero's propellered airplane (called "Jum Cessna"), JUMBORG ACE has proven to be yet another post-ULTRAMAN series which, like virtually all of them, fails to disappoint. One day, Tsuburaya will have to be put in the dictionary with this definition: "Tsuburaya (soo•boo•rye•yah) 1. Japan's premier family of revolutionary special effects. 2. Trademark name for numerous, FX-filled superhero programs about giant avengers who battle monsters in Tokyo using an assortment of rays & karate chops. 3. TV shows which really blow away the American garbage." I think I've made my point (again) and probably gotten a few fans ticked off in the process (yet again). The point being that I loved JUMBORG ACE, in much the same way that I loved MIRRORMAN, FIREMAN and the many Ultra programs. Since all these excellent Japanese TV shows all basically follow the same pattern, it's hard to like only one or two of them.

JUMBORG ACE, like FIREMAN was part of Tsuburaya's tenth anniversary celebration. JUMBORG ACE was originally intended to be sort of a live action variation on the hugely successful (in 1973, anyway) cartoon MAZINGA Z. Before 1972's MAZINGA Z, robots were considered basically big clunky machines often controlled by kids (i.e. GIGANTOR, JOHNNY SOKKO), but MAZINGA Z gave the genre a face-lift by turning the genre around, introducing "Super Robots" where the gigantic robot was more graceful, fighting machine (though still at the command of a human controller). Where as the MAZINGA Z series started a whole new genre, JUMBORG ACE, being live action, ended up looking more like another Ultraman. Also influential to JUMBORG ACE was Toei's KAMEN RIDER, though it didn't have the same amount of action, there were similarities in plot structure (i.e. the new 'sub-leader' of the villains being replaced by a successor every few episodes). Like KAMEN RIDER, and unlike ULTRAMAN (where the monsters were of independent origin), the villains are basically continuing characters through out the series, it's they who supply all the monsters for our hero to waste.

There's no shortage of colorful FX & costumes. Granted, there are a few laughable monsters, and the villains look not only bulky, but are obviously made of foam rubber. But you know what? I don't give a damn; there's no point in ragging too much on these cartoon-like giants so long as the dumb monsters in DR. WHO continue to impress sci-fi con-geeks the world over. I've said this many times before: If I had to construct monster costumes (and believe me, rubber is not cheap!) on a weekly basis, I'm sure I too would use up every idea except the kitchen sink, and no doubt a few of the more ridiculous designs would inevitably make it to the set. But for every goofy monster (and for the record, there are a few cool-looking beasts in JUMBORG ACE too), there are other special effects which make up for it. The miniature buildings used in the many destruction scenes are fine & dandy, showing definite signs of improvement since ULTRAMAN, and if you're a fan of jets & missiles battling the obligatory giant, have I got a series for you, JUMBORG ACE! By that I mean I recommend you watch it, and I'm in no way implying it's your personal property.

As always with a science fiction program of this nature, there's a fair amount of human drama that helps to build suspense & character development inbetween giant monster scenes. These talky scenes generally aren't much good if you don't know at least a little Japanese (JUMBORG ACE, like 99% of Japanese superheroism was never dubbed in English; though an Italian dubbed version of JUMBORG ACE is the movie GLI UOMINI DI MARTE MARS MEN). I, however, do know a little Japanese; it's amazing how short he is. But semi-seriously, if you can wade through the dialogue (tedious to the uninitiated), the plots really aren't that hard to follow; it's not like this series was made for people with I.Q.s like Einstein's. JUMBORG ACE is evenly rounded; decent continuity, well-written scripts. Neither dull nor action packed; but seriously designed-- yet not so dead serious that it fails to be fun.

There is, of course, the occasional episode with irritating kiddies, but they're not that dominant in the overall show. One example was episode #6, where heroic Naoki discovers his favorite plane (he's an airplane mechanic at some small airport) is being sold to some rich businessman. The real problem is that without the plane, he can't become humongous cyborg Jumborg Ace, so Japan will be helpless against giants like one-eyed Mons-Robo! Naoki gets upset and tries to explain that he needs this particular airplane, but can't say why, as it would reveal he has a secret identity as Jumborg Ace. Just when all seems hopeless, a thoughtful little boy (Kazuya) saves the day by pleading with the businessman to sell back the plane! He 'buys' it back with all the coins in his piggy bank! The businessman is so touched by this noble gesture that he flies the plane back to a happy, relieved Naoki, so Jumborg Ace can wipe out marauding giant Mons-Robo. The injoke is that the piggy bank is a Mirrorman toy, or a "Mirrormanny Bank"? So in this case, though the kid Kazuya got on my nerves, he at least served a crucial role in the episode.

The only other scenes in the program I could do without are the occasional shots of Naoki with his family; which get kinda' quirky-- though rarely stupid. It's strange that the name of the character is the same as the actor's name. Naoki



Villians Jum-Killer and Anti-Gone.

Tachibana, though he seems to be playing himself, isn't the best actor on Japanese TV. Example: The character is suppose to act angry or frustrated, yet acts more like a maniac-- at times he's a Japanese William Shatner (but hopefully Tachibana never released any albums where he talked songs like "Lucy in the Sky with Emeralds", or whatever the hell it's called). Though I've only seen nine or ten episodes of this show, I gather that Naoki's character, in addition to being a pilot, is also a skillful boxer, though from what I've seen, this show rarely involves any man-to-man combat. Naoki Tachibana would also go on to star in Toei's 1977 show ZA KAGE STA ("The Shadow Star"). According to Japanese fans, back in 1985, he was involved in some sort of scandal. He apparently murdered somebody and was imprisoned. Where he is now (still in jail?) is unknown.

Occasional familiar faces, like Toho guest stars (i.e. Jun Tazaki as a main character) aren't uncommon in this typically amusing saga of a scientific squad (another Science Patrol wannabe, except their uniforms are blue), an Earth defense team called P.A.T. (Protective Attack Team) protecting the world from alien attack. Interesting to note that a couple PAT members were also in MIRRORMAN as SGM members (so MIRRORMAN and JUMBORG ACE are loosely connected, but not directly). You got your pyrotechnical explosions, superimposed laser beams and other visuals, and of course, a young man gifted by aliens [called Emerald Seijin, who look more than similar to Ultraman; especially a particular character called Kain in episode #17] so he can become a huge android, Jumborg Ace. In this case, he controls Jumborg Ace from the inside, kind of like in YUUSHA RAIDEEN, GETTA ROBO, MAZINGA, etc., but he doesn't use as many levers and controls. His control of Jumborg Ace is more telepathic; he has some sort of headphones which I guess link his movements to that of the superhero, so it mimics his movements in battle. As is often the case, the giant hero has a warning light which activates when he's low in power, but it's nowhere near as cliched as in ULTRAMAN & MIRRORMAN; it doesn't happen that often (most of the episode don't use the warning light). But this time, protagonist Naoki Tachibana isn't an actual PAT member, but his late father (Tadao Nakamaru: SECRET OF THE TELEGIAN, THE MYSTERIANS, Red One's father in BIOMAN etc.) was one of their captains, so they allow him to hang out with them and he doesn't have to wear a uniform. Other supporting members are Naoki Tachibana's sister & little brother. An additional giant hero appeared later in the show, Jumborg 9, but there was no team up because the same guy (Naoki Tachibana) became each of them, so you never really see both at the same time (though once Jumborg 9 battled a Jumborg Ace imposter). Speaking of battles, we wouldn't have a very exciting series unless invaders kept unleashing giants to attack Japan, right? One of these humongous villains is called "Anchi Gone". 'Anche' is a Japanese attempt at saying either 'anti', short for 'antennae', or possibly even 'antler', it's hard to tell what they're getting at. As for "Gone", pronounced "Go-nay", it seems to be a variation on 'oni' as in Japan's mythical 'Oni Demons' or whatever. So it's possible villainous "Anti Gone" could mean something like Anti-Demon. Whatever it is, this creature lasted for the first 13 episodes. After Jumborg Ace destroys him, a new villain (Mad Gone) took over for episodes 14-32, who in turn got succeeded by Satan Gone (#'s 33-46). etc. ***1/2 -*Damon Foster*

SUPER ADAM ISTANBUL DA
("Super Adam in Istanbul") Yerli Film Ridvan Tual (whatever the hell that means), Takdim Eden, Erdo Vatan, Afiye Yank, Hayati Hamzagglu, Metin Yanki Hasan Ceylan, Revieu'ed by Damon Foster (possibly the only name in these credits you've heard of)

So this is what a Turkish superhero movie is like?! This incredibly low budget, lackluster squinter is the first flick from Turkey I've ever sat through & scoffed at. If nothing else, it was somewhat educational; Turkey being a borderline country which seems to link mid-Europe with the Middle East. So naturally, in much the same way Korean films remind me of Chinese/Japanese mishmashes, SUPER ADAM IN INSTANBUL falls somewhere inbetween Indian & Italian cinema. Though it lacks the endless song & dance crap (where all the women sound exactly alike) of Indian films, there's a bizarre, extended dance sequence set in some sort of brothel or drug-house, but it also concentrates on softcore sex (nudity of this nature is uncommon in Indian movies). So I guess SUPER ADAM is based more on Italian stuff, our lead hero looks like a Three Fantastic Supermen wannabe, and the actor chosen resembles Italy's Salvador Borgese (THREE SUPERMEN IN THE JUNGLE, THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE ORIENT, THREE SUPERMEN AGAINST THE GODFATHER and THREE SUPERMEN IN SANTA DOMINGO). Hell, in one scene, our dorky hero is even seen reading a Three Supermen comicbook. This cheap injoke isn't really much of a salute though, considering how dumb & dull SUPER ADAM is.

As disappointed as I was, I do not hate this movie. I mean, there are plenty of worse things in this world worth hating: Aggressive panhandlers, backed-up traffic, dog farts, stores which refuse to stock HEROES ON FILM, etc. The main obstacle which strikes severe blows against SUPER ADAM is, of course, the ever ominous language barrier. I could tolerate the horrible production values, the terrible acting, obvious stock music (it sounds pretty familiar, Chinese films have stolen such tunes too), miserable writing and pathetic film quality if I could figure out its dialogue laden plot! This movie could use a classic 'comedic' dubbing, ala Woody Allen's WHAT'S UP TIGER LILY, and could benefit from improved music & sound effects. Visually, this stupid yet mildly amusing would still suck, but I think in one way or another, it has the ability to entertain– for better or worse.

Okay, it should be obvious to you by now that SUPER ADAM ISTANBUL DA is a worthless, piece of junk not worthy of amateur films & videos of America (it makes Community Access crap look, well, uh, not so much like Community Access crap), yet I'm giving it a whole star! Why, do you ask? Well, take a guess! Give up? Okay, I'll tell you; it's got two whole things in its favor: Babes and fights! The girls are quite cute, and although the fights are for the most part lame, at least they tried their best. Again, they're trying to imitate that bizarre hybrid fighting system of Italian cinema which combines acrobatics with boxing hooks and some post-El Santo wrestling. The punches often have no form or power behind them, and miss their targets big time, but the quick pace of these unintentionally humorous skirmishes keeps them consistently amusing & silly. But none of it is done quite as well as that in the average "Italian acrobatic Superhero" genre created by Frank Cramer. For one thing, our hero's female sidekick does more handsprings than anything else. When used properly, handsprings & flipflops can really add excitement to a fight, but in this case, they're over used and appear in all the wrong places.

Like I groaned earlier, I don't understand the Turkish language, which hampered my ability to follow the story of this turkey from Turkey. It seems that when not in his cheap superhero costume (typical cowl, leotard, cape, boots, etc.) uniform, Super Adam is some dumb cowboy-like guy, and I guess he's going under cover to investigate the gory deaths of a couple female secret agents? It's hard to tell, but these gals at least try to put up a fight before they get slaughtered, via plenty of bloodshed. Anyway, we only see Super Adam in his costume two or three times, the remainder has our an-

noying, mild-mannered geek going through a series of stupid situations involving enemy agents, homosexual transvestites (that is, I mean they're men who love men and dress like women; it gets confusing), hookers, and more unnecessary characters than there are attorneys who would rather not have a ban put on lawyer-client sex. Anyway, the local villains have kidnapped some redheaded, acrobatic chick in a skirt, so Super Adam and another guy (probably a detective) rescue her and kill all the baddies. * -*Damon Foster*

OPERACION 67

("Operation 67") Estuodios America S.A., Directed by Rene Cardona & Rene Cardona Jr., Editor: Jose J. Mungula, Starring: Santo, Jorge Rivero, Elizabeth Campbell, Noe Murayama, Midori Nagashiro, Jose Luis Carol, Miguel Gomez Checa, Olga Morris, Maria Salome, Juan Garza, Gerando cepeda, Rene G. Barrera, Reviewed by Paul Schiola

This international wrestling bout was directed by Rene Cardona, along with his son Rene Cardona Jr. Rene Cardona Sr. was the director of the first El Santo movie, EL ENMASCARDO DE PLATA ("The Man in the Silver Mask") 1952, and was also one of the genius who kicked off the quintet of wrestling women movies. Cardona Jr. worked with his father on many films, and co-wrote the script to the last wrestling women movie, LA HORRPLANTE BESTIA HUMANA ("The Horrible Human Beast").

OPERACION 67 does not miss a beat. If there is one observation this Santo fan can see is that Cardona Sr. has a fantastic eye for this type of movie making. This is shown in the fluidity of this movie. Cardona Sr. is one of the few directors who can handle not only Mexico's biggest wrestling stars, but also handles the action scenes with a discerning eye. Granted OPERACION 67 has many of the earmarks of a low budget movie, like its fair share of stock footage, and all the explosions seem to be done in the same field, it has something many movies can't seem to work out, and that's the important aspect of continuity.

Although the script is heavily influenced by the secret agent films of the early sixties, it seems Santo's character works well in the over blown environment of spy flicks. Santo is coupled with the mucho macho wrestler, Jorge Rivero and are secret agents SX-1 and SX-2, respectively. They get called away right before Santo is coaxed into removing his mask by a young buxotic mexican woman and set on the trail of a convoluted international counterfeit conspiracy, which seems to have tentacles from Hong Kong to New York. Our heroes have everything in the book thrown at them, planes with machine guns, bombs on boats, skin divers with knives, a strange sound cannon, and the most deadly, an asian burlesque dancer. On top of all this you still get a heaping serving of action packed wrestling matches and strange gadgets, along with a variety of fist fights. Thank the gods it did not have any monsters, I don't think my heart could have taken it! **** -*Paul Schiola*

弘世超人 FROM ZERO TO HERO

Produced in 1994 by Sunshine Film Production House, in Association with Top Ten Development Limited, Distributed by Tai Seng Video Marketing Inc. (170 South Spruce Ave. Suite 200, South San Francisco, CA 94080; [415] 871-8118), Dir.: David Wu, Starring: Francis Ng and Anita Lee, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Rather low budget for a Hong Kong film, or rather, resourceful. The faces are generally unfamiliar ones, though star Francis Ng was also in OH! YES SIR & EASY MONEY, his leading lady Anita Lee was in TWO SHAOLIN KIDS IN HONG KONG, COHABITATION, & HELLO- WHO IS IT?, and both starred together in something called NAUGHTY COUPLES. There's not a whole lot of need for special effects or elaborate stunts in FROM HERO TO ZERO, but this Hong Kongese comedy manages to be consistently amusing throughout. FROM ZERO TO HERO is, however, difficult to categorize-- as a superhero adventure and blatant salute to comic books (the opening credits feature animated shots of Superman, Captain Marvel, Batman & Spiderman) it may come off as a kiddy film once or twice. But there's enough gore and sex comedy to assure this bizarre comedy/musical wasn't meant for the twerps.



The stars from ZERO TO HERO; Anita Lee and Francis Ng

As a comedy, it does supply enough laughs to satisfy. Our costumed hero has a habit of grabbing his crotch and dancing around (sometimes singing perverted lyrics) after he's done beating up bad guys. He has a tendency to think anyone he's rescuing is a damsel in distress, and insists on having sex (never shown, all we see are French kissing scenes) with the poor victim he just saved. This is fine if the victim happens to be a willing, attractive young woman, but more often than not, our obsessed hero ends up making out with the wrong types! In one scene, a man's confused daughter watches our hero carry her father away for a little fun, later he makes out with an ugly old nun, and finally, a dog whom he rescued from a mean owner who beat the poor animal. It's not every day you see a Batmanish hero get romantic with a dog and hug & kiss the confused animal on the lips. Some of these scenes fall somewhere between rather funny and downright hilarious.

As a superhero movie, the only reason it suffices is because English subtitles let us know what the hell is going on. Though there are three or four decent martial arts fights, this movie isn't absolutely action packed, so the subtitles are a must, in order to understand all the gags & sex jokes. Our hero's black costume is okay; obviously inspired by the success of the BATMAN movies. But the cowl actually looks more like the design for Japan's MIRRORMAN (Tsuburaya; 1971), except that it's black. Like I mentioned once or twice, our heroic pervert does tackle a few villains, but if you're just waiting for the fights, you'll encounter a long wait. Just sit back, open your mind, and prepare to accept whatever the flick throws your way, which is mostly comedy, drama, a little music, and, maybe a maximum of three typically Hong Kongese fights.

Some artist (Francis Ng) writes dirty comic books, much like those out of Japan, when in fact he would rather do wholesome "superman" style comics. But the perverted sex comics pay the rent, so he compromises, and makes a successful book called, according to the awkwardly translated subtitles, "Superman in Messy City"! But then again, in one seen, there's a brief picture of Ultraman and the subtitles label him "Colored Superman"! Any-

way, somehow the dorky artist becomes obsessed and his adrenaline convinces him he really is the so-called "superman" (more likely it should be called "Mirror-Bat-Man") of his comics, so he dresses up as this caped crusading guy and sets about fighting crime, with amusing, sometimes actually exciting results. A main subplot has something to do with a group of nuns protesting the very existence of "vulgar comics" (according to the subtitles), so he tries to keep his identity a secret from his liberated yet conservative mother and a female reporter he has a crush on. Eventually, 'Superman' overcomes his sexual appetite and gains the respect of the nuns, his mother, the townsfolk and the schoolboard. But just when everything seems happy, he relapses and shocks everybody with a vulgar song. The kids and nuns are in shock as our seemingly righteous hero breaks into a song & dance about how he saw Wonder Woman lying down naked, and naturally he wanted to have sex with her. But Batman beat him to her, so he grabbed Batman, pulled him off of her and had sex with Batman instead! End of film! *** *-Damon Foster*

HERO

Directed by Stephen Fears in 1992, Starring: Dustin Hoffman, Geena Davis, Andy Garcia, John Cusack, Kevin J. O'connor, Maury Chaykin, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Oops! Just how did this review fall into a magazine called HEROES ON FILM?! Oh, I see, that's it, the movie too is called HERO. But all it's got is that big-nosed Dustin Hoffman as a conman. It's just a lame comedy! Where are the karate fights? The Japanese monsters? The Mexican wrestlers? The flying robots? Not even a raygun! Don't judge a movie by its title. *-Damon Foster*

THE ROCKETEER

A Disney Presentation, A Gordon Co. Production, Producers: Lawrence Gordon, Charles Gordon & Lloyd Levin, Dir.: Joe Johnston, Exec. Prod.: Larry Franco, Story: Danny Bilson, Paul De Meo & William Dear, Screenplay: Danny Bilson & Paul De Meo, Music Composer: James Horner, Based on The Rocketeer graphic novel created by Dave Stevens, Cast: Bill Campbell, Alan Arkin, Jennifer Connelly, Paul Sorvino, Timothy Dalton, 109 Mins., Reviewed by Linda Arroyo

I never had a liking for Disney. They're just too damn sanitized!! In spite of that, THE ROCKETEER drew my attention because of the serial hero COMMANDO CODY (KING OF THE ROCKETMEN; 1949/RADAR MEN FROM THE MOON; 1952), which possibly inspired the film.



Dave Stevens, a comic book artist who is married to Scream Queen Brinke Stevens, amazingly takes Rocketeer into the real world of the 40s icons. Jenny, Rocketeer's girlfriend, is Steven's all-time favorite Queen of Pin-up Betty Page, who he draws in THE ROCKETEER comic! And like Jenny in THE ROCKETEER movie, though lacking Page's shapely (what a woman!) figure, was an inspiring actress. Stevens also introduces millionaire Howard Hughes, well known aeronautics and creator of Rocketeer's jetpack. Even Sinclair, the moviestar undercover nazi, resembles Erroll Flynn. Probably Stevens hates the actor displaying him in ROCKETEER as a nazi! (You won't hear me complain about it!) Another character is Sinclair's tall and gruesome bodyguard. Based on a true 40s actor who suffered from the same illness as the Elephant Man. And finally, Stevens includes the Feds (FBI) and gangsters, bringing the concept to live action!

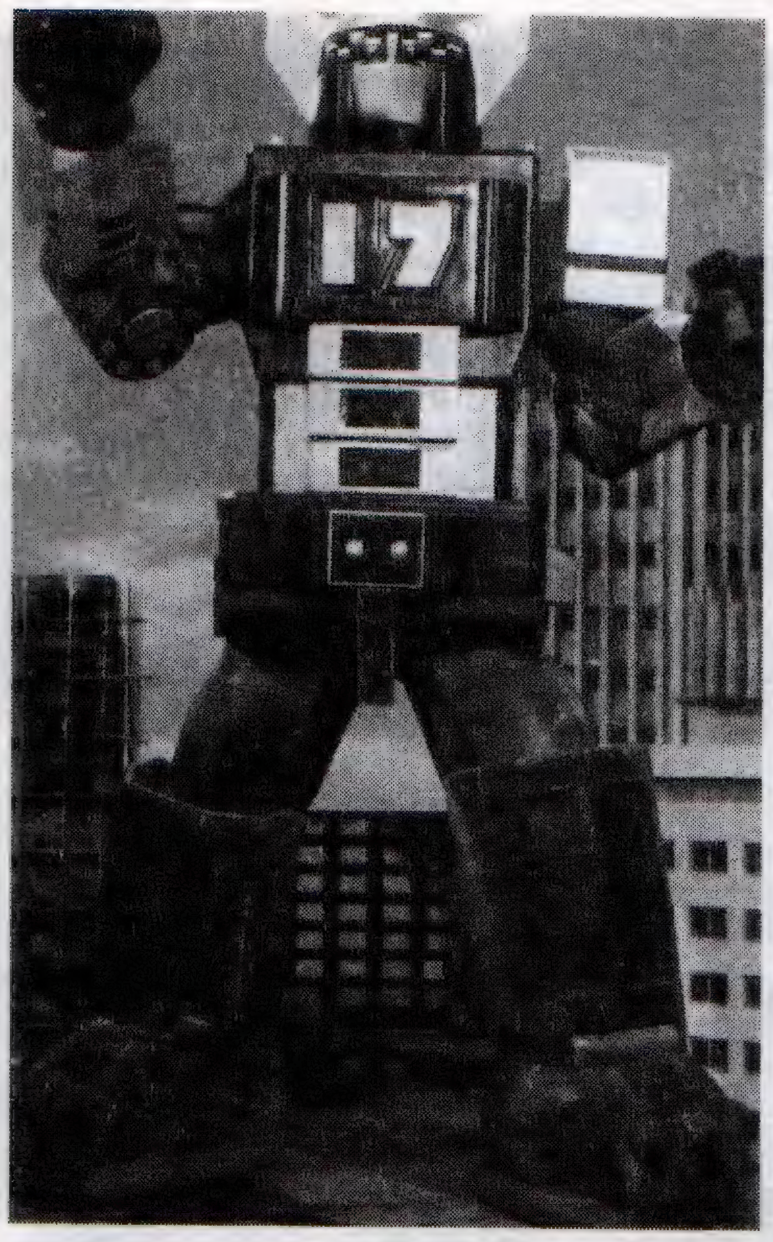
The 40s studio scenery takes you to the era in THE ROCKETEER, especially The South Seas club, a classy restaurant with an orchestra and a lovely songbird. But truly the gangsters set the pace with their loose personalities and slang! Rocketeer's costume, well it's not really a "costume", but anyway it's a fancy aviator jacket with a much better designed Commando Cody helmet and rocketpack! The dramatic shots of Rocketeer in flight were spectacular! Even though his inexperience would of had him killed in the beginning of the film. But as we know, the star never dies. I just wish he kept the bloody helmet on more!!! With the suspense and adventure you expect, THE ROCKETEER would be best viewed in B&W.

Discovering a jetpack which allows human flight, Cliff Secord (Bill Campbell) with his old friend test the jetpack on a statue. Later, in a no-choice situation to save a friend, Secord puts on the jetpack, now designed with a aerodynamic helmet! Exposing himself in the process to the public during an airplane show, Secord is named, after a rumble of ideas from reporters, THE ROCKETEER. Inviting the unwanted attention of Feds, gangsters, and nazis who are all after the rocketpack! Secord's girlfriend, Jenny (Jennifer Connelly, who starred in CREEPERS; 1985), lengthens his burden when she dates Sinclair at the South Seas Club in hopes of making him jealous. And he wasn't! WONDERFUL!! I can't stand MUSH!! Especially earlier when Sinclair woos Jenny. YAWN! The awaiting arrival of a brawl in the club with Secord as Rocketeer is where Jenny gets kidnapped by Sinclair, in order to extend the adventure, of course! A captive in Sinclair's home, Jenny reverses the playact on Sinclair allowing her to club him with a vase (That a girl!) and discover that he's a German spy! Nevertheless, she remains in Sinclair's possession. To save Jenny, Rocketeer must hand over the rocketpack in a meeting set up by Sinclair. But with the gangsters as well as the Feds intervention, Rocketeer flies toward the nazi zeppelin where Jenny is captive near the end of the film. The scene taken from Dave Steven's comic book cover of THE ROCKETEER is commemorated when Rocketeer stands by the American flag holding a gun. A fictional hero come to life! Finally exchanging Jenny for Rocketeer's jetpack, Sinclair (Timothy Dalton, aka James Bond) suits up, unaware of the rocketpack's leakage, which was punctured earlier. Flying out of the soon to explode zeppelin, believing he had won, and BOOM!!! People often learn too late. ***1/2 *-Linda Arroyo*

BRAIN 1-7

[aka REVENGE OF THE DEFENDERS] Released to America in 1982 by Modern Programs International S.A., Based on Shotaro Ishimori's DAI TETSUJIN WAN SEBUN ("Giant Ironman 17", aka "Iron Robot 17") produced by Toei in 1977, consisting of 35 episodes, Broadcast on TV Asahi from 3/18/77 to 11/11/77, Creators: Shotaro Ishimori & Tohru Hiriyama, Main Writer: Shozo Uehara, Main Dir.: Minoru Yamada, Music: Chumei Watanabe, Starring: Masahiro Kamiya, Reviewed by Damon Foster

BRAIN 17 is to the DAI TETSUJIN WAN SEBUN series what VOYAGE INTO



SPACE is to that old show JOHNNY SOKKO AND HIS FLYING ROBOT. In fact, the series itself is a remake and/or ripoff of JOHNNY SOKKO; both programs involve kiddies controlling a giant robot to battle giant monsters, including the obligatory giant eye-creature. And again, the movie ends with the heroic robot sacrificing himself to destroy the remaining villains, at the climax. The only major difference is that BRAIN 17 is only available in English as this movie, the whole show itself never got any English dubbing. I don't really understand why they wanted to make JOHNNY SOKKO all over again, but since they did, why didn't they just call it JOHNNY SOKKO '77, or in English, it should be called VOYAGE INTO SPACE '82!

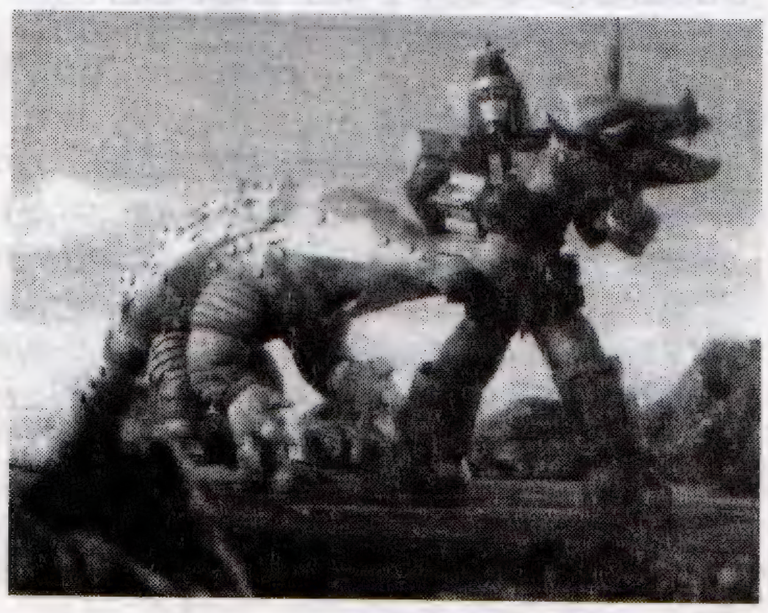
Though the special effects are generally an improvement over JOHNNY SOKKO, I can't help but prefer the original, since I saw that when I was a little tyke, and naturally loved that sort of infantile action. But watching BRAIN 17 today (it's not a series I grew up on, but was aware of its existence since its 1977 debut) is a generally unpleasant experience. I generally can tolerate kiddy movies (making a magazine like this demands a certain acceptance of infantile genres), but occasionally, I'll see one so stupid, like BRAIN 17, that it's hard not to role my eyes and look at the clock every five minutes. I feel stupid watching it, but it was intended for my generation (I was part of its target age group when it was produced). As I mumbled 237 words ago (and if you count all of them to double check my work, you've no life), the FX are okay; adequate miniatures and pyrotechnics which are only slightly below average for a Japanese sci-fi flick. But some of the designs of the robots (a steamroller robot and a jackhammer robot) are just too damn stupid.

What this boring, infantile movie could use is more humor. BRAIN 17 is too childish to take seriously, and the occasional jokes put in the dialogue help relieve the naive repetition. Though the narrator camps it up too much (sounding like a low key parody), there are amusing lines, like in a serious, tension filled moment between two soldiers. One soldier offers a plan which may have severe consequences, and refers to this solution as "A real humdinger of a doozy"! Heroic Stevie's dubbed voice really got on my nerves, sounding like an adult man who's had a ten ton weight dropped on his genitals.

There are, however, a couple scenes which you wouldn't necessarily expect in a kiddy film. In one scene, the body of one of the good guys is found crucified, and there's an extremely short glimpse of blood (I'm sure they censored plenty for our protection). Many kiddy movies try to refrain from death scenes and usage of words like 'kill', but at least BRAIN 17 has the guts to ignore that rule! There are at least a couple scenes of people being wasted by machine guns. So I guess in this way, BRAIN 17 isn't all stupid, and is almost worth checking out. Almost.

Watch for guest cameos by late actors Akihiko Hirata (in most of Toho's older sci-fi flicks) and Akira Yamaguchi from PHANTOM AGENTS, DENJIN ZABOGA and KAMEN RIDER V3. Both play temporary villains dubbed 'Captain Roper', and 'Chief Kid'! In fact, all the characters have stupid names, a Japanese soldier is called 'Captain Bob Kendal, alias The Razor', and there's a master computer called Big Angel. I'm sure lead hero Stevie, the guy in the ridiculous helmet isn't called that in Japan.

Some super-dooper advanced computer called "Brain" (looking like gumballs connected by poles) conspires with nasty Professor Hassler to conquer Japan. Fortunately for them Japanese (a great many of which, happen to reside in Japan), Brain's creation, the mighty giant Robot 17 becomes a good guy and helps young man Stevie (Masahiro Kamiya) & a squad of soldiers. Stevie's family had been killed by Brain, and a subplot briefly touched upon (no doubt more dominant in the uncut, Japanese-language TV show) is that Judy (a soldier) bears a striking resemblance to Stevie's sister (killed on her wedding day). Speaking of soldiers, Professor Hassler and Brain want helpers too, so they rescue then hire jailbirds to be their nazi-uniformed henchmen who are never really given much to do. Anyway, the course of this badly dubbed, rushed, awkwardly edited movie has Brain 17 tackling Brain's evil robots, including a cool dragon monster controlled by sexy female villains in hot pants called the Pink & Blue Jaguars. Within Robot 17 is Orson, a mini-robot and warning device. Both are destroyed when they sacrifice themselves to demolish Brain and Professor Hassler. *1/2 -*Damon Foster*



HURACAN CONTRA LOS TERRORISTAS

("Huracan vs. the Terrorists") Dir.: Juan Rodriguez, Producer: Ethel Medina Carpizo, Cinematografica: Rodriguez Y. Hija, Starring: Huracan Ramirez, Paul Rogers, Miguel Angel Ghigliazza, Evilin Solares, Armando Mauriez, Juan Rodriguez, Ivonn Rubio, Adriana Carpizo, Reviewed by Paul Schiola

There are times when I regret the advancement of video technology, especially when it comes to "camcorders". The reason I say this is because it gave Juan Rodriguez the excuse necessary to create this crap. That might be a bit harsh, but truly warranted. It seems that the only thing the '80s gave to Mexican film makers was the opportunity to take advantage of plummeting budget costs due to the ease of access to video cameras and editing equipment. It amazes me the shear quantity and low quality of the movies of this era. The part that stings the most I admit is seeing one of my favorite genres of film being drug to these depths, I mean its not the photography, or that its shot on video, but the whole thing is weak.

I have noticed in a lot of lower budget flicks that they steal the soundtracks from other big budget ventures, but these folks didn't have the sense (or taste) to do that! The only somewhat redeeming quality to this "accident" is stated in the title, Huracan Ramirez. Unfortunately, Huracan is in about 15 minutes of this iron oxide error and the majority of this time he is either wrestling, or training one of the human pieces of lunch meat how to defend himself against the terrorists. When he is wrestling, the matches look

as if they are shot in a YMCA gym, and the crowd (and I use that term loosely) is composed of what appears to be the children of the cast and crew, or badly edited-in crowd scenes from more than likely a good wrestling flick.

And lets not forget the "terrorists", these guys don't know if they want to be terrorists, or a biker gang. Either one they are an embarrassment to any self-respecting terrorist group-- I mean come on, I roust people who are passed out in my parking space that are more threatening than these guys; sheesh!

The alleged plot to this farce is, terrorists are ripping off gun stores and munitions shipments from the U.S.A. (that's what the crates are stenciled in, anyway) and plotting to blow up buildings and wreck general havoc on unsuspecting Mexico, and Huracan works with authorities to thwart their evil plot, and of course, succeeds. My advice is to ignore this movie but don't ignore Huracan Ramirez, there are better movies of his out there. -*Paul Schiola*

THE ADVENTURES OF EL FRENETICO & GO-GIRL: THE CASE OF THE WAX TERROR

1994; Amusement Films, Produced by Pat Bishow & Owen Cooper, Directed by Pat Bishow, Available from Amusement Films (c/o Just Kids), 310 New York Ave., Huntington, NY 11743 (phone: [212] 388-2319), Starring: Frances Lee, Charlie Pellegrino, Jon Sanborne, Dana Lyons, Reviewed by John Grace

There are a few inspired moments in this 30 minute amateur video, the best scene being where Go-Girl (Frances Lee) is attacked by two Zanti Misfit-inspired, paper mache spiders. Otherwise, this is a mildly entertaining tribute to Mexican wrestling movies and the old BATMAN tv show.

The film's worst flaw is the lack of sound effects during the fight scenes. When Go-Girl kicks a henchman, it's just too quiet. There's also a tendency to let the camerawork and editing do more of the fighting than the actors. There are lots of quick cuts and repeated shots, unfortunate traits that have plagued many recent American and Hong Kong action movies. Jan Sanborne's performance as the villain is painfully obnoxious, and will have you using your VCR's scan button more than once. There isn't enough humor for the film to qualify as a comedy, and there isn't enough real action of suspense to consider it an adventure film.

This is not to say that the vid is bad. I do hope Amusement Films produce future installments, since this vid is better than many of the amateur vids praised by other publications. Besides, projects



like this should not be discouraged.

The heroic duo of El Frenetico (Charlie Pellegrino), an alcoholic masked wrestler, and Go-Girl, an Asian American babe in a skintight outfit are out to stop a villainous millionaire (Jon Sanborne) who has kidnapped a muckraking reporter (Dana Lyons) and plans on controlling the city with his Krazy Cakes products. The Krazy Cakes turn people into wax figures and are advertised with a neat jingle and commercial. ** -*John Grace*

DANGER DIABOLIK

Distributed by Paramount, Sogotto Di Angela E., Luciana Giussani, Dino Maiuri, Adiano Baracco, Scenteggiatura Di Dino Maiuri & Mario Baua, Directoe Du Produczione: giorgio Adriani, Dino De Laurentis Cinematografica, Musica Di: Ennio Morricone, Diretto Da: Mario Bava, Prodotto Da: Dino De Laurentis, Con: John Phillip Law, Mariesa Mell, Micel Piccoli, Adolfo Celi, Claudio Gora, Mario Donen, Renzo Palmer, Caterina Boratto, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Yet another Italian movie about a superhero who also happens to be a thief, much like ARGOMAN and the first THREE SUPERMEN movie, but not as good. Diabolik is actually way more a master criminal than superhero, since although he's battling bad guys, he's not afraid to harm innocent people that happen to get in his way. His costume is very unspectacular, looking like little more than a ski mask and a wet suit. DANGER DIABOLIK looks like more of a spy movie than anything else. It's a lot like OPERATION KID BROTHER, in fact featuring one of the same villain actors.

Other cast members include John Phillip Law (from BARBARELLA and GOLDEN VOYAGE OF SINBAD) as the title character, and Terry Thomas, an old British guy with a really familiar face! When I was a kiddy, I thought this 1960s comedian was hilarious! I believe he was also in an episode of THE MONKEES, a flick probably called THE PERILS OF PAULINE, and some other movie where a chimpanzee threw some fruit at him. Sorry to sound so vague, but I have all these memories of old films & actors I've not seen since I was a kiddy over 20 years ago. In DANGER DIABOLIK, Terry Thomas generally isn't dubbed, it seems he's really speaking English in his own voice, and plays a character called the Minister of Finance.

But other than trivia like that (above) and some sexy girls, I'd say DANGER DIABOLIK, even dubbed in English is a disappointing, nonsensical bore. The script (or so to speak) is fragmented, one sequence has Diabolik rescuing his kidnapped girlfriend, and later, there's something to do with bullets made of emeralds (?), and eventually, Diabolic blows up Tax Collectors' agencies (nice miniatures of exploding buildings which rival even the best Japanese movies) and hijacks a truck. Does this flick sound like an excuse for lots of action? Well, it's not! For every one-second fist fight (both of them), every uninteresting shoot-out, and lame matte effect of two men who 'jumped' (hah!) out of an airplane, there's plenty of downright tedious drama & dialogue, bad acting, sappy romance, uninspiring erotica, and some attempts at humor which fall flat.

As stupid as DANGER DIABOLIK is, I can think of a whopping three good things about it: 1. Ennico Morricone's quirky, typically 1960s music alternates between James Bond-ripoff songs (complete with women singing badly) and his usual THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY style tunes. 2. An extremely cool set that our main character, Diabolik lives in!



This futuristic cavern puts the Batcave to shame and is a sci-fi lover's dream come true! Portions of it resemble the domain of the Phantom of the Opera. 3. It's only a movie! Nobody forced me to watch it, nor will anyone ever force me to watch it. This review is complete, I'll never sit through this dumb movie, ever again! That in itself is reason to celebrate.

Diabolik is a mysterious phantom; a master criminal who steals anything of value: Money, jewels, gold, etc. He's rich and sort of an 'evil James Bond', who, along with his sexy blond girlfriend lives in a cool island fortress. Since he wears a mask to conceal his identity and takes on villains, he's almost a superhero, but more of an escape artist. He fakes his own death, uses an occasional disguise and can out-manoeuvre his enemies (like Inspector Jinko) in car, boat, submarine & plane chases. The course of this talky farce has Diabolik up against not only the cops, but some rich mobster called Ralph Valmont, who I swear was also in OPERATION KID BROTHER or some such film. Anyway, eventually, the police locate Diabolik's secret arsenal, resulting in the not so climactic shootout. An explosion leads us to think Diabolik is really dead this time, until he winks at the camera before the ending, which reads "Fine". All the credits are in Italian (even in this English dubbing), but I take the word 'fine' in its English context. Yep, we should 'fine' them for making this crappy flick. -Damon Foster

ULTRA 7: SUN'S ENERGY OPERATION

["Taiyo Enelky Sakusen"; 1994], Starring Koji Moritsugu, Reviewed by Paul Haberman

This made for television special brings back that famous hero of the 1960s-- Ultra 7. Taking place after the end of the original series, two of the original "Ultra Squad" members return-- Furuhashi and Anna (aka Donna), though Anna is retired and living with her son & daughter. The team is rounded out with three new members, none of which are really worth going into detail about (their characters are pretty typical).

What this special lacks in character development, it makes up for with action. The Ultra 7 himself doesn't do much until the very end, this hour-long episode moves along at a brisk pace.

This special was very well done, and a must see for all Ultra fanatics. Fans of ULTRASEVEN will definitely enjoy it. The special effects are excellent (though shot on video), and all of the music is taken from the original show, even the opening credits! A second special was also aired in Japan. This one brings back the Metron Seijin and.... Dan Moroboshi!! This special will also be reviewed at a later date.

Basically, TAIYO ENELKY SAKUSEN is a sequel of sorts to the original episode #3: During a routine patrol in space, Ultra 7 crashes to Earth. Meanwhile, aliens disguised as Earthling females come to Earth and make a new Elking (the most famous of Ultra 7's foes). The Earth government tries to revive Ultra 7 with a new device that harnesses the sun's energy. After a few run-ins with the Ultra Squad, Elking finally battles Ultra 7, who is revived just in time. In a climactic battle, Ultra 7 defeats Elking, destroys the alien ship, and rescues Anna's son (named, appropriately, Dan). With his job finished, Ultra 7 returns to space. *** *-Paul Haberman*



LAS MOMIAS DE GUANAJUATO

["The Mummies of Guanajuato"] Produced in 1970, Starring: Blue Demon, Mil Mascaras, Elsa Cardenas, Jorge Pinguano, Santo, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Despite a slow start (seemingly endless shots taken around a tour bus), and the mandatory full hour of dull talking (useless if, like me, you don't understand Spanish), this is possibly the best Mexican wrestling movie I've seen to date! Made at a time when production on these wacky farces was at an all-time high, and producers were actually putting a little money into the budgets, this masterpiece

(by Mexican standards) probably represents the cream of the crop!

Sure, it still comes off as cheap by American standards, but certainly no worse than America's low budget, B-movie monster flicks from the 1950s and 1960s! Hell, at least LAS MOMIAS DE GUANAJUATO has enjoyable fist fights and a fairly fast pace (though could still have been better if they'd realized their strengths are fights & campy monsters, not endless dialogue & needless technicalities). What a shame this one was never dubbed in English! Where's the logic of releasing all those comparatively lackluster, early 1960s B&W Mexican films to America, yet to the best of my knowledge, a superior movie such as this remains a thrill for Spanish language viewers only! But on THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILM SHOW (a British program hosted by Jonathon Ross), they actually showed a clip from this movie, but with English subtitles! Does anybody know the true story behind this?! Did that program just add subtitles to that clip, or is there actually a subtitled print in existence of LAS MOMIAS DE GUANAJUATO?!?!?

The villainous mummies look cheap, no ifs ands or buts. Though certainly no worse than the creatures in Ray Dennis Stecklers' THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE CREATURES THAT STOPPED LIVING AND BECAME MIXED UP ZOMBIES, they all definitely look exactly like what they really are: Men wearing tattered clothes and latex masks. Speaking of masks, my only other real complaint (besides a few very slow scenes) is that because co-hero Mil Mascaras ("Million Masks") wears so many different masks, it became hard to recognize and identify him, it took me a while to realize he's only one person. The only way he happens to stand out is that he's much taller than lead hero, Blue Demon.

Mexico's most famous wrestler, Santo himself has a special guest appearance, but it looks like all his shots might have been done in one day. He's shown in a flashback scene (a wrestling match; one of two of the only matches in the movie), and returns for the last ten minutes to help Blue Demon & Mil Mascaras rid a village of marauding mummies. When Blue Demon was interviewed on THE INCREDIBLY STRANGE FILM SHOW, he expressed regret that although Santo's role was little more than a cameo, it's Santo who suddenly saves the day when he shows up with guns which shoot fire. I don't know if this was a deliberate act by the director to make Blue Demon & Mil Mascaras look like helpless idiots, but it would seem to be the case, as earlier in the movie, Mil Mascaras fires flames out of his secret agent-like boots, yet his fire doesn't prevent the mummies from knocking our two heroes out cold!

The story starts off with some midget tour guide leading tourists through some museum at Guanajuato, whatever that is. The first group of mummies appear to be authentic, I'm sure they're the real thing. They're behind glass and would be just too expensive to make as props! But the man-in-suit mummies aren't separated from the tourists by glass, so it's obvious that these are the ones made of latex. For whatever reason, they come to life and eventually kill the midget and night watchman at the museum (or whatever it is). It seems the leader of these mummies has a personal grudge against wrestlers, because he used to be a wrestler when he was alive, and was defeated by Santo. So this wrestling mummy (in a torn up wrestling leotard, facial makeup appliance, and absolutely bare arms) frames Blue Demon for murder. Throw



in a nightclub ballad or two, some little kid, ineffective police always a step behind our heroic wrestlers, a couple pretty ladies, and more than a couple tedious conversations, and that sums up the story. By the middle of the film, I was wondering, "What the hell am I doing watching this boring crap?! I've got a life, don't I?!" But just when I was ready to finally give in and press that ever-tempting Scan button, that midget (mentioned earlier) gets killed by Mummies and the wrestling duo gets surrounded by mummies in a building and it's time to clobber! Fortunately, the latter half makes up for the drab beginning and middle. There are probably four or five battles through out the film, and pitting masked wrestlers against mummies (more like zombies by our standards, as they lack the wrapped bandages of Egyptian mummies) is the best fun Mexican wrestling movies have to offer. These fights aren't real graceful, but with enough punch and nifty music (sounding kinda' like Spanish bullfighting music!) to make them oodles of fun. The climactic confrontation lasts a whopping five minutes, as all three wrestlers tackle then burn the out-of-control mummies. ***1/2 -*Damon Foster*

ATOMIC RULERS

(aka ATOMIC RULERS OF THE WORLD) Presented by Walter Manly, Screenplay: Ichiro Miyagawa, Photographed by Takashi Watanabe, Music: Chumei Watanabe, Produced by Shintoho Co. Ltd., Directors: Teruo Ishii, Akira Mitsuya, Koreyoshi Akasaka, With: Ken Utsui, Sachihiro Ohsahawa, Junko Ikeuchi, Minako Yamada, Shoji Nakayama, Kan Hayashi, Minoru Takada, Utako Mitsuya, Reviewed by Damon Foster

Another old Japanese, B&W masterpiece edited from a late 1950s serial, but released in feature-length, English dubbed form for its American TV release, ATOMIC RULERS (1961). Like EVIL BRAIN FROM OUTER SPACE (reviewed last issue), this crude classic also features the adventures of Starman (inaccurately named "Super Giant" in the original Japanese serials it's composed of), Japan's first live action superhero. Though ATOMIC RULERS lacks the mutant monsters of EVIL BRAIN, it features just as much action. For years, I've heard these two films (and the other two Starman movies, to be reviewed in upcoming issues of HEROES ON FILM) criticized by American viewers for being cheap, unintentional comedies. Well, to all you damn bastards who badmouthed the Starman movies, you guys can just go suck on a used tampon! As far as I'm concerned, these movies are oldies but goodies, and easily helped inspire the later superhero programs which would appear in Japan in the early 1970s. The Starman movies even had a couple inferior ripoffs; PRINCE OF SPACE and the dreadfully dull INVASION OF THE NEPTUNE MEN.

Ken Utsui played his role well as Japan's superman from space, Starman. The character deals well with both adults and kids, and is one of the few Japanese heroes not to act stupid and embarrassing around the twerps. In his not so-mild mannered form, the kids even mistake our benevolent savior for a gangster. Utsui's only over acted scene is toward the end, when Starman gives a confident, extended laugh at the Magolian Embassy. I was a little disappointed that there's no team up with Starman and Detective Okamoto, who's played by the one and only Shoji Nakayama! He's a superhero legend in his own right, as he'd later play Captain Kiriyama in ULTRASEVEN and starred in the Toho classic RYUSEI NINGEN ZONE (aka "Zone Fighter", unofficially).

But as cool as it is, ATOMIC RULERS

isn't perfect. Like most old Japanese sci-fi movies dubbed into English, there are a few scenes which come off as silly by today's standards. It's limited budget resulted in a terrible miniature of a helicopter which dangles back & forth, much like the prop of Saturn (possibly a large cardboard cut-out) in the opening sequence on the Emerald Planet. Even more amusing is how the innocence of the 1950s may accidently look sexually suggestive by today's demented standards. In one scene, a boy is kidnapped, and the kidnapper can't seem to take his hands off the frightened lad. Back then, it was obvious that the villain was just trying to intimidate, but in the 1990s, he comes off as a pedophile. Later, Starman himself would appear to demonstrate a homosexual streak, though unintentionally. In the scene where Starman cleans a smudge off a frightened prisoner's face and smiles, I burst out laughing when I first saw this scene when I was about 12 years old (even then, it looked kind of fagotty!).

But not all the humor in ATOMIC RULERS is accidental. Starman's cockiness among the enemies is quite amusing, like when he punches a guy on a train, knocking him out. Passengers are concerned by the struggle, so Starman reassures them, "Oh, nothing to worry about. The gentleman is feeling ill". Another gag (?) happens near the climax of a cool fight in a house. The fight itself has him using mostly just pushes to defeat a large group of gangster-like henchmen, but this battle is also a salute to swashbuckler movies, complete with music, swinging from a chandelier and even some European fencing. The joke (?) happens near the end of this duel, when Starman tosses his sword to a decorative suit of armor on display. But this empty knight suit catches the sword! Is this an intentional laugh? Or a technical glitch (the effect was achieved by pulling a wire connected to the sword, so it leaves the knight, and the scene is reversed. It could be that the knight's glove just got caught on the sword).

Them sign-language versed robots of the Emerald Planet again send their remarkably Japanese-looking superhero, Starman to Earth's Japan to battle bad guys! This is the only of the four films where the villains are Earthlings, not alien invaders. In this case, they're the mythical nation of Magolia, determined to use nuclear threats to dominate the world. So Starman flies to the rescue, and I must say, for a supposedly 'cheap' movie, Starman's flying FX are surprisingly effective. He rescues a plane from crashing, rescues a kidnapped orphan, and unconvincingly (punches which miss by miles) beats up a few Magolian henchmen before the villainous leader (Munta Dean) frames our Emerald hero for murder. But he escapes prison in time to rescue some girl called Reiko (who nearly got beheaded and fed to toy alligators!) held captive at the Magolian secret arsenal. Speaking of which, this is one awesome set; it's hard to believe it's in the same film which had the worst miniature helicopter I've ever seen! The epic base includes water, a dock, and a submarine resembling the one from 200,00 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA. But by this time, neither this ship nor the Magolians' bombs are a match for Starman, who singlehandedly beats the crap out of each and every one of them via judo chops and an occasional acrobat before Detective Okamamoto and a squad in riot gear arrive to arrest the survivors. ***** -*Damon Foster*

SUPER ISLAW AND THE FLYING KIDS
Dir:: J. Erastheo Havoa, Presented by Century Exchange Ltd. & Regal Films, Starring: Janice De Belen, Nadia Montenegro, Drannel Belleza, Kristina Paner, Anjo Yelana, Richard Gomes, Reviewed by Damon Foster

You've heard the phrase, "If you've seen one, you've seen 'em all", right? The most accurate use of it applies to Filipino movies like this worthless pile of feces. As with SUPER NAMAN, KUMANDER BAWANG and SUPER MOUSE AND THE ROBO RATS, I have the same complaints and criticisms. They're all garbage, and for the exact same reasons: 1. Dirt cheap. 2 Poor film quality. 3. Talky. 4. Slow paced. 5. Misleading. SUPER ISLAW AND THE FLYING KIDS is all that and less. Expect deja-vu every time I review a Filipino farce. Finding a good Filipino superhero movie is like finding an out-of-work proctologist in San Francisco.

SUPER ISLAW continues the Filipino tradition of putting a superhero on the cover of the videobox, even though this silver, flying hero is only in the movie for about ten minutes! Even when Super Islaw is actually on screen, he's rarely doing anything heroic. We see him talking, dancing at a party and trying to get a girlfriend, but there's very little action. Even when there is action, most of the fights are bewilderingly poor, I was capable of better stunts when I was ten years old. I've seen arguments which looked more dangerous than the so-called action (what little there is) in this complete and utter piece of garbage.

It's phenomenally amazing that this romp sucks so bad! A space-age superhero defends a poor Filipino village from some honestly creepy looking zombies--zombies who's makeup is about equal to that in the original NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD! Think of it; George Romero-esque zombies thwarted by a metallic superman! Can't miss, right?! A sure hit! How could they possibly go wrong? I'll tell you how-- Numero Uno: We only see the zombies for about ten minutes. Numero Two-o: Our hero is rarely in the same shots with the zombies. Numero Three-o: 95% of SUPER ISLAW concentrates on dialogue, tedious drama, godawful slapstick, terrible music & sound quality, pointless filler (it's gotta' be feature length, ya' know?), and excessive characters & subplots.

Inbetween nonsensical shenanigans of teenagers in a low key village, there's a worthwhile shot about once every 15 minutes. At the beginning, our crippled young hero (before he gets his magic powers) flies using handmade wings, and it's a tolerable matte effect. Later, I guess we're introduced to a couple wizards; one good, one not-so-good. Oh yeah, somehow a Catholic Church figures prominently in all this. The nice wizard turns the crippled boy (and later, three girls too) into a superhero called Super Coleslaw. I'm sorry, I mean Super Islaw! The bad wizard, on the other hand, prefers to raise the dead and the zombies aid some corrupt, power-hungry militia who are ransacking the whole film. Well after the middle of this disappointing romp, Super Islaw (looking like a cross between Superman, Flash Gordon, and John Travolta's disco-duds in SATURDAY NIGHT FEVER), in his silver space suit and cape, flies to the rescue. Meanwhile, three teenage girls use the kind wizard's magic cane to become superheroines. It's here when, for a minute or two, SUPER ISLAW finally becomes tolerable. Decent martial arts and super-imposed lasers add unexpected amusement [to a film which was otherwise anything but amusing] as the four heroes rid the dark, dimly lit village of zombies, soldiers and the magical villain, who bears a slight resemblance to HK's 1970s star Chen Sing. The final five minutes deserve a star, but the remainder of SUPER COLESLAW ruined everything. -Damon Foster

LOS VAMPIROS DE COYOACAN
Dir.: Arturo Martinez, Prod.: Rogelio Agrasanchez, Starring: German Robles, Mil Mascaras, Superzan, Shasha Montengro, Carlos Lopez Moctezuma, Dura Vargas, Tony Salazer Greco, David Castaneda, Reviewed by Paul Schiola

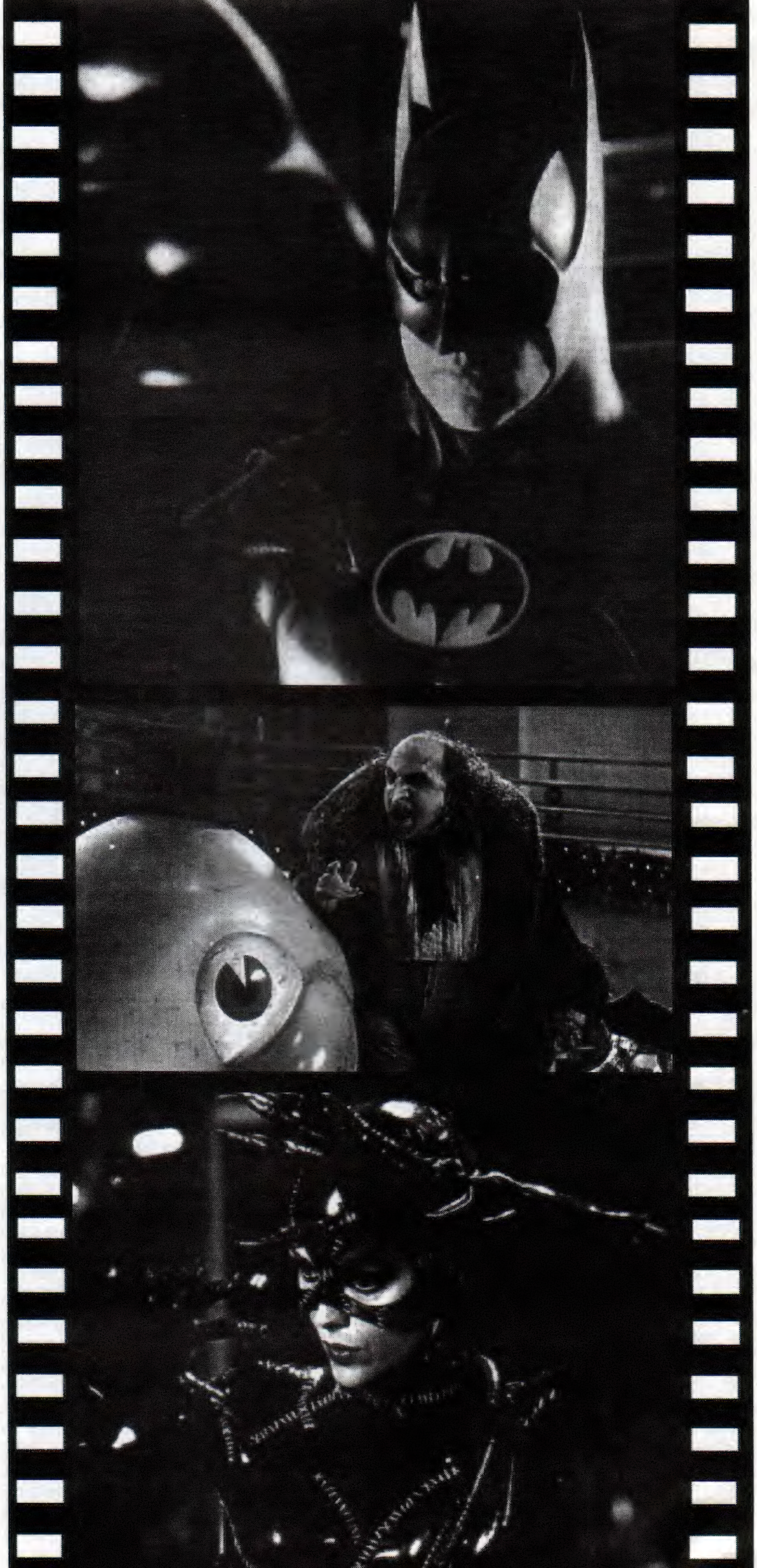
Being a masked wrestler in Mexico is no easy job. You can bank on when you have finished a grueling wrestling match, and return to your home that someone will come up with an emergency of some sort that needs your particular attention. And as we can guess from the title the trouble in this case is "Vampiros".

As with most films about vampires,

they have a variety of shapes they can shift into, depending on the culture, its surroundings and of course religious beliefs. The Mexican vampire happens to be one of my favorites, because they are usually very outlandish, and Baron Bradok in this flick is no exception. Our bad baron has three forms he can take: A bat of course, his own evil self, and one wicked ass were-bat! Baron Bradok's were-bat form is a neat makeup effect, changing him into a furry, snarling, bat-eared critter, usually when he is about to do something really evil like snatch up a young woman for lunch or pray to Satan.

LOS VAMPIROS DE COYOACAN has one of my all time favorite things, dwarves. Yes, Baron Bradok's henchmen are four vampire dwarves with fangs, ashen faces, the works. And when the horrible short ones scrap with our heroes, they really have to earn their pay; as soon as, say Superzan, picks one of the vampire dwarves up and throws him to the ground he immediately turns into a bat and flies back to attack Superzan only to be thrown on the ground again, frustrating our heroes. Dwarves or midgets seem to be a staple in Mexican horror movies, the reason for it is not clear to me, I mean yes, they are small people and kind of odd but not really horrifying. Bizarre or maybe surreal yes. None the less if its going to have a spooky atmosphere, there will at least be one dwarf (or midget) hanging around.

This is an over all good movie, it kicks off with a tag team wrestling match with Mil Mascaras and Superzan who after are asked to team up with an expert on the occult, to try and defend a physician's daughter who is under Baron Bradok's spell. It has great wrestling action, cool spooky trappings, and of course, dwarves. An all around good addition to the wrestler vs. vampiros tradition. *** -*Paul Schiola*



BATMAN RETURNS

1992, Directed by Tim Burton, Screenplay: Daniel Waters, Starring: Michael Keaton, Michelle Pfeiffer, Danny Devito, Reviewed by John Grace

The screenplay is written by Daniel Waters, author of HEATHERS (the only teen movie from the 1980s that's worth a damn), so the film is loaded with black humor, some surprisingly vicious scenes of violence, double entendres and a much-needed sense of anarchy.

Michael Keaton's portrayal of Batman is different from the stoic hero of the previous film. This time, he seems really unsure of himself and even nervously talks to himself when he struggles with the steering wheel of a sabotaged Batmobile. He also smiles every time he

does something sadistic to a villain, such as burning a crook with the Batmobile's flame exhaust and strapping dynamite to the Penguin's gargantuan bodyguard.

Michelle Pfeiffer's portrayal of Catwoman steals the show. With her whip, claws and tight leather outfit, how could she not be a scene stealer? And Danny Devito's Penguin is a bile-spewing, scene-chewing, nose-biting, webbed-hand (or was it a flipper?) mutant with a penchant for rioting.

The elaborate sets are actually impressive, making Gotham City look like a city, the action scenes are much better, with some decent kickboxing by Pfeiffer's double, Kathy Long (who now stars in various unwatchable B movies), and there is also a plot, something the first film lacked. At the time of its release, the film was the target of enraged suburban parents who protested the film's violent content. When the film was broadcast on NBS, the network censored some of the mild gore scenes (which were no worse than anything on MIAMI VICE). Hey, any superhero movie that garners that type of reaction is okay by me!

Tim Burton's gothic Hammer Films-meets-Fritz Lang direction works better this time out, probably because he had more creative control. His macabre touch will be missed in the forthcoming installments of what will probably be a long-running film series. ***1/2 -*John Grace*

LOS CUATRO BUDAS DEL KRIMINAL

(Umberto Lenzi; 1966) Asst. Dir.: Jaime Bayarri, Decorator: Cubero Galicia, Music: Manuel Parada, Starring: Glenn Saxson, Helga Line, Andrea Bosic, Tomas Pico, Frank Olivier, Maria Frances, Trashed by Damon Foster

If ever I saw a worthless stinker of a film, it's this Italian/Spanish (co-production) drama about some mysterious phantom, anti-hero or master criminal. Slow-paced, talky (dubbed in Spanish), downright uninteresting all the way! Masked avengers weren't uncommon in 1960s European cinema, but few of them suck as badly as this one. Hell, I thought DANGER DIABOLIC was the pits; but this yawner somehow manages to be even worse! Talk about determination! Better fun to be had French-kissing a cobra.

As though anyone cares, I believe the Italian title of LOS CUATROS BUDAS DEL KRIMINAL is simply KRIMINAL. There was a sequel I'm in no hurry to see, called IL MARCHIO DE KRIMINAL (Fernando Cerchio; 1967), which means "The Mark of Kriminal". Contrary to what I said in the previous issue's editorial, I believe the comicbook series actually came out after the films.

For what it's worth, the plot has something to do with the quest for maps, at least one of which is hidden in some small Buddha statue. There are plenty of unnecessary characters searching for the map (s) in this virtually actionless (okay, so the very ending has a lame car chase; woop-dee-dee!) snore-a-thon. The only worthwhile thing is the main character's (a master criminal, not much of a hero really) cool skeleton costume. He bears a striking resemblance to the Black Scorpion hench-scientists of Destron in Japan's infinitely superior KAMEN RIDER V3. But otherwise, this all-talk soap opera isn't worth your time; we only see the protagonist's costume for a few minutes, and even then, it's usually in the dark. -*Damon Foster*

CAPTAIN AMERICA

A Menahem Golan Production; 1990, Dir.: Albert Pyun, Prod.: Menahem Golan, Exec. Prod.: Stan Lee & Joseph Calamari, Music: Barry Goldberg, Story: Stephen Tolkin & Laurence J. Block, Screenplay: Stephen Tolkin, Based on Characters Created by Joe Simon & Jack Kirby, Cast: Matt Stalinger, Scott Paulin, Kim Gillingham, Ronny Cox, Ned Beatty, Francesca Neri, Darren McGavin, Bill Mummy, 1 hr., 32 min., Reviewed by Linda Arroyo

Looking almost exactly like the original comic character, CAPTAIN AMERICA, unfortunately but not unexpectedly, lacked 01 Winghead's chainmail costume, his perfect human physique and abilities. You might say the movie is nothing like the comic book character, but he's more exact than the other so-called Captain Americas on television. And I'm satisfied with that! Matt Salinger portrays Steve Rogers (aka Captain America) as an inexperienced supersoldier (?). After his transformation, Captain America is immediately parachuted from a plane into enemy lines during WWII. Suddenly being discovered by a watch-tower man, Captain America hesitates before slinging his shield (which is made of adamantium but was not mentioned) destroying the watch-tower. As a Captain America fan, I ignored such hogwash and began to see Captain America leaping right at the Nazi guards! Captain America's M.O.!

I pitiful excuse to draw adults who don't read comics gives no right to sex-change or reverse roles from the original comic book characters. The female creator of the formula which transforms Stever Rogers was originally created by a male scientist. Rogers's army partner in the comics was called Bucky. For the movie he was changed to Bernice (Kim Gillingham who also plays Sharon), Rogers's girlfriend before his transformation. Even Sharon, Bernices' daughter, was originally Captain America's girlfriend and a secret agent for the organization S.H.I.E.L.D., not some valley girl!

Though not appearing as the original comic character, Red Skull's into in a long black leather coat standing on a catwalk was one sure looker! Red Skull's make-up was gorgeous, added with his Italian accent and arrogant mannerism! Unlike Red Skull's comic persona who wore a redskull mask and was German. But Scott Paulin was one hot pasta as Red Skull, nonetheless!!! Sadly, that's the last time we see the bald-red beauty. He appears later, with the help of plastic surgery, as a businessman in tailored Italian suits (still one sure looker!), living in Fortress Lorenzo, his birthplace as Red Skull. His daughter, Valentina (Francesca Neri), would be recognized by Cap Fans as MOTHER SUPERIOR or SIN of the team SISTERS OF SIN.

Besides the touch-ups conforming to conservative ideals ruining the original concept, CAPTAIN AMERICA was a very good film. Damn it! It was a GREAT film!!! Though having a regular storyline with hero versus villain, it displayed comic book characters live and up-close!

The common story (to CAPTAIN AMERICA comic readers) mixed with a revised version for the movie, begins with Captain America's transformation, getting kicked in the ass by Red Skull, and being frozen for some decades. Later reviving battling Valentina and her gang (not like the comic characters, I'm afraid) to being saved by Lux Luther's yes-man Ned Beatty (SUPERMAN, SUPERMAN II, etc.) who played the popular reporter Sam. After Captain America's home-coming, and soon the murders of Bernice & Sam, he searches for captive President and Red Skull. Amazingly, the President (Ronny Cox) in CAPTAIN AMERICA is pretty tough for an old former soldier. And with the closing of the film two familiar celebrities from childhood were Bill Mumy (LOST IN SPACE, BABYLON 5) and Darren McGavin (THE NIGHT STALKER) who portrayed the two-faced General Fleming. Mumy portrayed Fleming as a young soldier in his 40s and McGavin played Fleming in modern times.

Discovering Red Skull's lair, Captain America ends Red Skull's plan to brainwash the President and blow-up half of Europe by knocking him off the Fortress's side into the sea with his shield. And concurringly, without the shield returning to Captain America, it strikes out Valentina who was about to fire at The Shield Slinger. Now after this, the shield returns to Captain America and he assures the audience of victory by looking into the camera with a silly smirk on his face. **** -*Linda Arroyo*



At this point, there don't seem to be a whole hell of a lot of other superhero magazines out there. As I understand it, SENTAI has gone on a temporary hiatus, unfortunately. I have also heard of upcoming zines called HENSHIN and ULTRA-FAN, but have yet to see the physical proof-- I won't review or recommend a magazine until I've actually seen it.

KAIJU REVIEW- What started out as mainly a Godzilla fanzine has evolved into being one of the better Asian filmzines in general, and will be of special interest to superhero fans. If you are into the likes of KIKAIDA, ULTRAMAN, ULTRASEVEN etc. you'll definately want to get info (for subscriptions, prices of issues available, etc.) by sending a Self-Addressed-Stamped-Envelope to Dan Reed (editor), at KAIJU REVIEW, 301 East 64th St. Suite 5F, New York City, NY 10021

SANTO STREET- An informative newsletter which should tell you everything you ever wanted to know about Mexican wrestling flicks. This publication is useful research material, in fact much of the Mexi-wrestling material in H.O.F. comes from this here publication. Ten bucks buys you a four issue subscription, or you can spend $25.00 for a three year subscription, lasting 12 issues. Brian Moran, P.O. Box 561307, Orlando, FL 32856

MONSTER ATTACK TEAM- Okay, so they stole their title from the RETURN OF ULTRAMAN series. But otherwise, I still can't figure out them thar Texans over 'yonder! Are they a fan club, or a Community Access TV show called ALIEN DEATH SQUAD? All I know is they publish a decent fanzine about Japanese superheroes and monsters, called MONSTER ATTACK TEAM, of course. But good luck trying to track down their editor, Edward Holland, since his residency changes more frequently than Madonna's hair style. If you can track him down, send an SASE to Ed Holland, who's address, at the time of this typing is: 13352 Maham Rd., Apt. 282, Dallas, TX 75240.

KAMEN RIDER REPORT (cont.)

ALL BACK AGAIN! THE 7 KAMEN RIDERS

["ZENIN SHUGO! SEBUN NO JIN KAMEN LAIDA"] 1/3/76, 40 Min., Reviewed by DF

It's nonstop action from start to finish in this TV-made special! Kamen Riders 1, 2, V3, Riderman, X, Amazon and Stronger get together at Korakuen amusement park with their longtime pal Tobei Tachibana (Shoji Kobayashi). While watching a Kamen Rider stageshow performed by imitators, they reminisce about past battles, via stock footage & flashbacks to all the programs; re-introducing all the characters, good & bad. Though there are some truly irritating (that's putting it mildly) little kids at the beginning, once the Kamen Riders (hell! They even got all the original actors back, even Hiroshi Fujioka, who would rarely return to play Kamen Rider!) appear and recall their exciting past. But after all the flashbacks, it turns out the monsters in the stage play were real, and they're now beating up the fake Kamen Riders! So once the large audience stampedes away to safety, our seven heroes 'henshin' into their Kamen Rider forms for a special confrontation filmed exclusively for this outstanding TV featurette! *****

KAMEN RIDER

[aka "Shin Kamen Rider", "Kamen Rider Shin", "New Kamen Rider", and unofficially "Sky Rider", possibly even "Kamen Rider Sky"] Toei; TBS, 10/5/79 thru 10/10/80, 54 episodes, Producers: Shotaro Ishimori & Tohru Hiriyama, Main Writer: Masaru Igami, Main Dir.: Minoru Yamada, Music: Shunsuke Kikuchi, Starring Hiroaki Murakami, Reviewed by DF

At this time, I've only seen one episode (#53) of this series, so I can't make much of a guess on the quality of the whole series. Since it lead the way into the 1980s, it's no surprise that it has a certain high-tech flair to it, the type of slickness which would highlight so many later 1980s TV shows to follow. Though I'm the type who, for some reason prefers the old, crude 1970s style, I most confess that the lone episode I've seen is pretty damn cool! This show returned the design of our hero to being much more like the original Kamen Riders (Sky Rider lacks Stronger's bulkiness and Amazon's Tarzanness), which seemed to make the series a hit, finally! This program lasted 54 whole episodes, so it's second only to the original 1971 series!

As decent as this series appears to be, already I can think of one major complaint: Its title! KAMEN RIDER was the title of the original 1971 series! So why is this 1979 sequel called the exact same thing? Was it originally suppose to be a remake (I think not, since at least a couple of the original Kamen Riders returned to team up in this show)? To avoid confusion, many fans have given the 1979 series unofficial names like "New Masked Rider". But generally, it's referred to as SKY RIDER, because that's the name of the hero. He's the first Kamen Rider who could actually fly, although the others could jump up to 66 feet high. ***

MAJIN TEITOKU NO SAIGO! SOSHITE DAI SHUGO NO SHOTA KIYU HA?

{"The Last of the Demons! Who is their Commander?"}

(NEW) **KAMEN RIDER #53**

FS: Flashback; people walking into a cave.

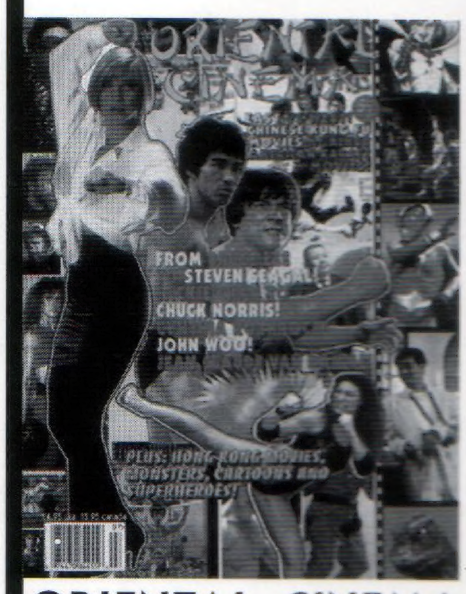
This episode seems to be part of a long, on-going story; and since it's the only one I've seen, I'm not sure what's going on. I gather that Hiroshi Tsukuba (Hiroaki Murakami), who becomes Sky Rider, is investigating the kidnapping of his parents, by General Monster (a gigantic, excellent dinosaur/dragon who commands the local villains!) and his empire. In one scene, it looks like villainous Majin Teitoku claims to be Hiroshi's father, in order to get a piggy-back ride! Okay, so I'm not a translator, but this enjoyable episode has a number of fights and appearances by Kamen Rider 2 and Kamen Rider Stronger. Dir.: Okunaka Sunyo ***

DRACULINA PUBLISHING

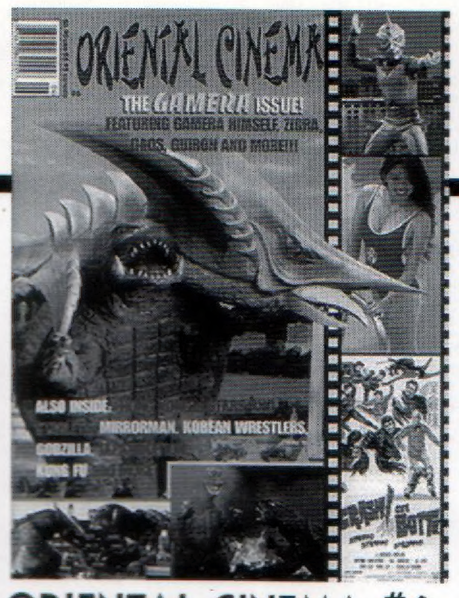
BACK ISSUES



HEROES ON FILM #1: From BAT-MAN to MIGHTY MORPHING POWER RANGERS! Superheroes and super heroines of movies and TV! **$4**



ORIENTAL CINEMA #7: Added COLOR PAGES! This issue features Kung Fu from both sides of the globe! From BRUCE LEE to CLAUDE VAN DAMME! - **$5**



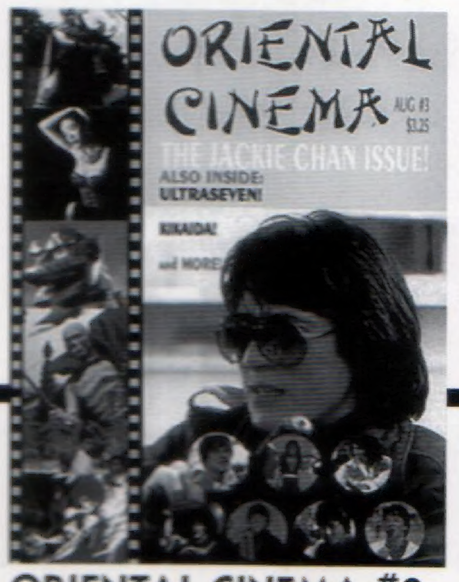
ORIENTAL CINEMA #6: The GAMERA ISSUE! Celebrating the release of the new GAMERA movie! Plus Hong Kong Action stars, starlets, superheroes, Filipino horrors, Japanese animation and more! **$4**



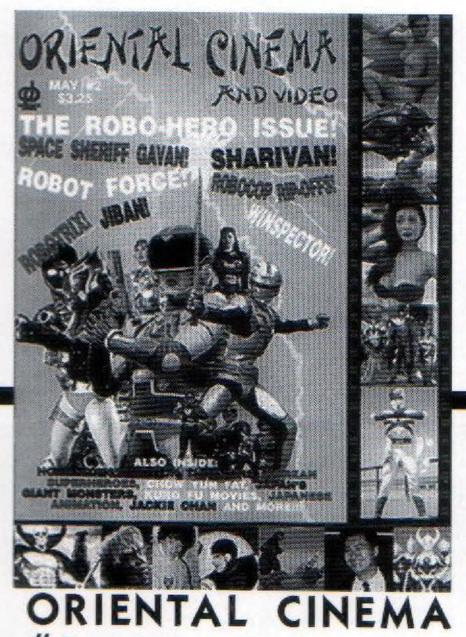
ORIENTAL CINEMA #5: The Hong Kong Gangster Issue! From Chang Cheh to John Woo, Chow Yun Fat, Ringo Lam, plus Japan's monsters, superheroes, beautiful women of Asia, and more. **$4**



ORIENTAL CINEMA #4: The Godzilla Issue! Hong Kong action, Mighty Morphing Rangers, Samurai TV shows, and Asian beauties. **$4**



ORIENTAL CINEMA #3: The Jackie Chan Issue! Featuring rare information on Jackie and his films. Also including Ultra 7, Kikaider, Samo Hung, Godzilla, Japanamation, Asia's Gorgeous actresses and more. **$3.25**



ORIENTAL CINEMA #2: The Robo-Hero Issue! Robot Force, Robocop, Lady Battlecop, Hong Kong action thrillers, Japan's giant monsters, Korean superheroes and more. **$3.25**



ORIENTAL CINEMA #1: The Ninja Issue! A comprehensive look at Ninja movies, Godzilla, Ultraman, Jackie Chan and Hong Kong's femme fatales. **$3.25**



DRACULINA #23
ALL GLOSSY PAGES! OVER 50% IN FULL COLOR! JULIE STRAIN! DEBORAH DUTCH! MANDY LEIGH interview & **CENTERFOLD!** Plus, JOAN GERARDI, GATOR BABES, MELISSA MOORE, ADDICTED TO MURDER, JAMES DEAN's CURSED CAR, JAMES O'BARR interview, DEATH SCAN and MORE! Our best looking issue yet! **$6**

ORDERING INFO

AGE: You must be over 18 to order DRACULINA or SHE.
Postage: 1- magazine $1.50. 2-3 magazines $1 each. 4 or more magazines - $3.
ORDERS OVER $25 CAN BE CHARGED TO VISA or MASTERCARD. Send card number, exp. date and signature with order. Send to:

DRACULINA PUBLISHING
PO BOX 587
GLEN CARBON, IL 62034

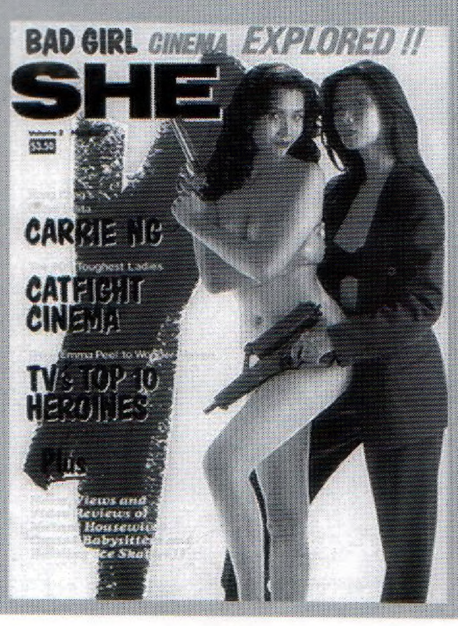
SHE #4: The FIGHTING FEMMES of the WILD WEST! Plus, the NEW Queen of Category III Cinema YUNG HUNG! News, views and reviews! **$3.50**



SHE #3: In-depth look at Anita Mui, Bimbo-Rama 2, Jungle Beauty and more! **$3.50**







SHE #2: Pauline Chan story, Brigitte Nielsen, Nancy Kwan, Japan's Battle girl, Catfight Cinema. **$3.50**
SHE #1: Carrie Ng, Catfight Cinema, The 80's Toughest Ladies, TV's Top Heroines, from Emma Peel to Wonder Woman. **$3.50**

3 SUPERMEN IN S. Domingo

Directed by ITALO MARTINENGHI

Starring: DANIEL STEPHEN
SAL BORGESE
STEVEN MARTIN
GENA GAS